

ELECTION '97: no one's pulling our strings

THE INDEPENDENT

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WEATHER: Cold and windy

(R45p) 40p

THE TABLOID

Star Wars strikes back

EDUCATION +
What makes
a good teacher

ESSAY

Fisk in Ireland:
heaven, hell and
politics PAGE 18

Trainspotting: the reality

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

A disturbing picture emerged yesterday of a British society caught up in a culture of drugs, widespread illegality, official corruption, and an inability to cope with the rising tide of narcotic abuse.

A Home Office study estimates that there are more than 30 million drug deals each year in London alone, of which only one in every 4,000 street sales results in an arrest. If the average deal costs £20 the annual amount spent by consumers on drugs in the capital is £600m.

Researchers also highlighted a fraud involving private doctors being paid £25 bribes to prescribe large amounts of drugs to addicts. Users charged new drug consumers an introductory fee to meet the corrupt doctors.

The report, *Tackling Local Drug Markets*, gives a fascinating but depressing insight into the secretive world of dealers, buyers, and addicts. It shows

A drugs such as heroin, crack cocaine, and ecstasy, that takes place in public or semi public places.

Of the estimated 30 million drugs transactions in London each year, deals that take place on the street or in public places are believed to account for between three and five million. The majority of sales, usually of cannabis, occur in homes.

The people questioned spent on average £333 a week or £17,300 a year on their drug habit.

The core of the research examined six street dealing sites in London. A picture of each area or "market" was built up using interviews with drug users, probation officers, the police, and drug workers.

A picture of a multi drug abuse emerged in which orders were taken on stolen mobile phones, people queued to obtain illegal drugs from pharmacies, secret identities were used, consumers bought their daily fix along with their shopping and a casual disregard for the police were commonplace. Hard drugs appeared freely available in all the areas studied.

The researchers also discovered a scam involving corrupt private doctors and pharmacists. The private GPs were charging a weekly £25 "consultation fee" to be paid before the prescriptions were handed over. Some doctors are believed to have long lists of "clients" who take advantage of the system. "The least scrupulous of private prescribers can maintain high throughput by offering minimal patient care: some respondents told us that they were given prescriptions in the absence of drug screening, medical histories and urine tests," said the report.

They found that excessive amount of drugs were being prescribed, suggesting the doctor knew some were for resale.

Drug users reported that pharmacists could also make large amounts of money by handling the private prescriptions. "Some of our respondents firmly believed that their doctor and pharmacist worked in profit sharing partnerships," said the report.

"Pharmacists often allow users credit. This enabled the users to collect half their prescription, sell it and then pay off the pharmacist and collect the remainder of the prescription."

Researchers estimate that of the 500,000 people in London who regularly take illicit drugs - mostly cannabis - between 20,000 and 40,000 are "problem users". In 1994 the Metropolitan Police prosecuted or cautioned 23,000 people for drug possession or supply offences.

Sales of street heroin were typically £10 for a 0.1g bag, crack was on average £20 for a rock. Users obtained their money from a number of methods including drug dealing, benefit fraud, shoplifting and prostitution.

Two-thirds of the people interviewed said their market place was violent. Being mugged, either for drugs

Drug culture: Ewan McGregor in the acclaimed film *Trainspotting*

Photograph: Liam Longman/Polygram

or money, was commonplace and in some areas turf wars between rival gangs took place.

In most of the areas studied drugs could be obtained 24 hours a day. In one market users seeking a fix said it took on average about 10 minutes to get their drugs. Stolen mobile phones were frequently used by dealers to take orders for drugs. The phones were recycled among the criminal fraternity to avoid detection by the police.

In poor, multi-ethnic, inner-city areas the white, Asian, and West Indian dealers competed to provide narcotics, which often led to violence.

Even apparently rich areas suffered from the blight of drug abuse. In one area the researchers noted: "Buyers commented that this was a pleasant area in which to shop; they would sometimes buy drugs while doing their weekly shopping or sit and have a coffee while waiting for a seller. The stalls, shops and people are also provided opportunities for shoplifting and selling goods."

In this cosmopolitan area heroin was available in Portuguese cafes, cannabis from street vendors, crack from West Indians, and pharmaceuticals from a chemist.

Among the recommendations were calls to tighten up controls over private prescriptions and pharmacy dispensing, more use of surveillance cameras, increase the police practice of monitoring drug dealer's mobile telephones, and make more use of surveillance operations. Driving prostitutes off the streets may also help in lowering the demand for drugs.

Mr Rose, who was suspended from the party after writing a letter to the local paper about the Mining Community Group, says he was the victim of a "vendetta because of my fight against corruption on the council." He is seeking "a commitment from the party for an independent and properly qualified investigation into Doncaster District Labour Party".

The letter to Mr Blair goes on: "The Mining Community Group still meets in secret to dispense patronage and favours".

Mr Rose's first letter to the Labour leader in October 1995 also refers to allegations of "systematic corruption that is endemic within the Doncaster Labour Group". He said: "The



main weapon to be used was the payment of NUM members to attend meetings to back NUM motions and nominees". The system was later "hijacked to take over the local council", according to Mr Rose.

Mr Rose said last night: "I wrote to Tony Blair because I know we now have someone in the leader's office who is prepared to tackle this type of issue among local Labour parties. Ms Morgan was very sympathetic and said she would be coming back to me."

On Tuesday night, one of the Labour councillors who had gone on several trips abroad at the council's expense, Tony Sellars, won his third ward nomination for the Don Valley seat which is currently vacant following the death of Martin Redmond.

Mr Sellars has so far won all three ward nominations. The party's National Executive Committee will be meeting next Monday to interview the candidates and decide on a shortlist, which will be voted on next month by local Labour Party members.

Leading article, page 17

QUICKLY

OJ offered deal

Fred Goldman, the father of Ronald Goldman, who was killed with OJ Simpson's wife Nicole, offered to give up all claims on the \$25m punitive damages awarded against Mr Simpson if the footballer signed a detailed confession to be broadcast and published across the United States. Page 2

Labour censure

A Labour censure motion against the Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg is to be tabled for Commons debate on Monday, adding to the pre-election pressure on the government. If the motion is carried Mr Hogg would be forced to resign, and Labour could put down a confidence motion.

Prison officer found

The body of the missing White-moor prison officer Peter Curran was found in a car dragged from a canal in Cambridgeshire. He vanished in March 1994, two days after being suspended for smuggling toiletries into jail. He was also linked to the escape of IRA prisoners. Page 4

Labour's warning of crime wave

The spectre of increased urban lawlessness will be raised today by shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown, writes Anthony Bevins.

Although the Government was able to take comfort from a fall in unemployment yesterday, it faced a Bank of England challenge on interest rates and the Wirral South by-election campaign was dominated by Unilever's warning on European Monetary Union.

Mr Brown will warn today that "The re-election of the Tories would risk the creation of a fifth-term underclass that would take us down the road of America, with no-work and no-go inner city areas plagued by lawlessness."

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how drugs, sleeping tablets and prescribed medicines are illegally obtained via a clandestine web of contacts. Dealers go to extraordinary means to protect themselves from the police and complex relationships are established between the traffickers and clients. The findings are believed to mirror other large cities in Britain, where law enforcement officers and drug workers have conceded that drug abuse is continuing to spiral out of control.

The study, by the Police Research Group, focuses on the dealing of pharmaceutical medicines and Class

Blair was alerted to Doncaster shenanigans 18 months ago

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

Tony Blair was alerted to widespread abuses among the ruling Labour clique on Doncaster council almost 18 months ago.

A former councillor, Ron Rose, received no reply to the letter which was delivered to Mr Blair by Tony Booth, the Labour Party leader's actor father-in-law and a friend of Mr Rose.

Mr Rose was told that the letter had been passed to officials at party headquarters. He wrote again last month, outlining the way in which the Mining Community Group, a small group of leading councillors, "meets in secret to dispense patronage and favours".

Mr Booth said last night: "Tony Blair read the letter and passed it on to be dealt with by Labour Party officials."

On Tuesday, *The Independent* revealed that some members of the ruling Labour group in Doncaster had flown around the world and gone on drunken binges at the expense of council taxpayers.

Mr Rose's letters describe several similar events and provide evidence of widespread misbehaviour by councillors. His second letter says: "Doncaster is a can of worms for the party", and he goes on to make allegations against a number of senior members.

Mr Rose, a playwright who wrote a BBC TV series, *Love and Reason*, about a corrupt local council, fell foul of the Mining Community Group when he was a councillor between 1986 and 1990. The second letter addressed to Mr Blair describes a series of events over the past 15 years during which the council was allegedly run by a cabal.

Sally Morgan, one of Mr Blair's aides, telephoned Mr Rose to say that she was dealing with the matter.

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news

significant shorts

Seven are charged over college fraud inquiry

Six people have been charged with conspiracy to defraud a Birmingham college following an investigation into alleged phantom courses. A seventh person has been charged with forgery in connection with the two-year police inquiry into the running of community courses on behalf of Bournville College of Further Education. Detectives from the West Midlands Police Fraud Squad charged the four men and three women, who all come from the Birmingham area, within the last fortnight. They will appear before magistrates later this month.

The police investigation centred on courses run on behalf of Bournville College for members of Birmingham's Asian community. They included Islamic studies, sewing and English language for women. The college funded the programmes but franchised out the teaching to four local training provider organisations. Police were called in in January 1995 following claims that some courses had never taken place and that students reported to be on the roll did not exist.

Lucy Ward

Irish suicides on the increase

The Irish Republic's suicide rate is the fastest-rising in Europe, according to a report published yesterday. But Ireland is still near the bottom of Europe's suicide "league table", according to the *Irish Medical Journal*, which gave depression and alcoholism as the chief reasons for Irish people killing themselves.

The journal's report, *Psychiatric and Social Background to Suicide*, said the people most at risk from taking their own lives in Ireland were those under the age of 30. The survey indicated that until the early 1980s, 90 per cent of Irish suicides were attributed to mental illness, but since that time crime, drugs problems and changes in family structures had led to a range of new causes.

Safe seat for Labour frontbencher

The last Labour frontbench MP left without a constituency at the general election is to fight for a safe seat vacated at the last minute by a 71-year-old left-winger. Bryan Davies, the party's higher education spokesman, will take part in a truncated selection battle in Newport West, South Wales, where Roy Hughes announced his intention to retire on Tuesday. Mr Hughes' decision has also sparked rumours that Alan Howarth, the former Tory minister who defected to Labour, could be given the seat. However, members will be given the chance to vote in a ballot and would be unlikely to choose him. Mr Davies' Oldham constituency disappeared in boundary changes.

Fran Abrams

Forsyth backs Dunblane plea

Michael Forsyth, the Secretary of State for Scotland, last night added his voice to an appeal by the Dunblane parents for privacy on the anniversary of the massacre. The parents and relatives of the victims of the tragedy have asked for the media to stay away from the town on 13 March. They have also asked for a "simple candlelit gesture" to mark the day, ending speculation that an emotional public memorial service will be held. Mr Forsyth (left), who is the local MP for Dunblane, said last night: "The children and their teacher will never be forgotten and will be in everyone's thoughts on 13 March. It would be wonderful if the media respected the wishes of the families for peace and privacy on that day. Earlier, in a statement, the parents said: "Thursday March 13 will mark the first anniversary of the deaths of our children and their teacher at Dunblane Primary School. This will be a very emotional day for us and for the rest of Dunblane. We have decided that this must be a day free from media attention, during which we will remember our loved ones in our own personal way. We do not wish there to be any public event on the anniversary."



More homeowners join homeless

An increasing proportion of council and housing association tenants are former home owners who have fallen into arrears on their mortgages and had to sell up. Nearly two-thirds of householders offered accommodation by councils or housing associations after being homeowners were classified as homeless after defaulting on their mortgages.

A new survey of tenants by the University of York shows that those moving out of council housing are most often younger, better-off couples. They are being replaced by poor households, often headed by single parents. More than 70 per cent of households accepted as tenants by local authorities or housing associations were headed by people aged between 16 and 29. The study concludes that "a more mobile population and growing concentrations of low income tenants are making it harder to sustain stable communities on council and housing association estates".

David Walker

Scargill blow as party aide quits

Just weeks before the general election Arthur Scargill's tiny Socialist Labour Party is in disarray after the resignation of its general secretary, Pat Sikorsky, who was responsible for organising the party's election effort has quit, leaving the SLP in crisis. In a letter to Mr Scargill, Mr Sikorsky says that he was unable to combine the general secretaryship with his job as a guard on London Underground.

While Mr Sikorsky denies any differences of opinion, observers of left-wing politics contend that there was a personal and political clash with the autocratic Mr Scargill, who is also president of the National Union of Mineworkers. Mr Sikorsky has returned to London Transport having served three years on the executive of the RMT rail union.

Barrie Clement

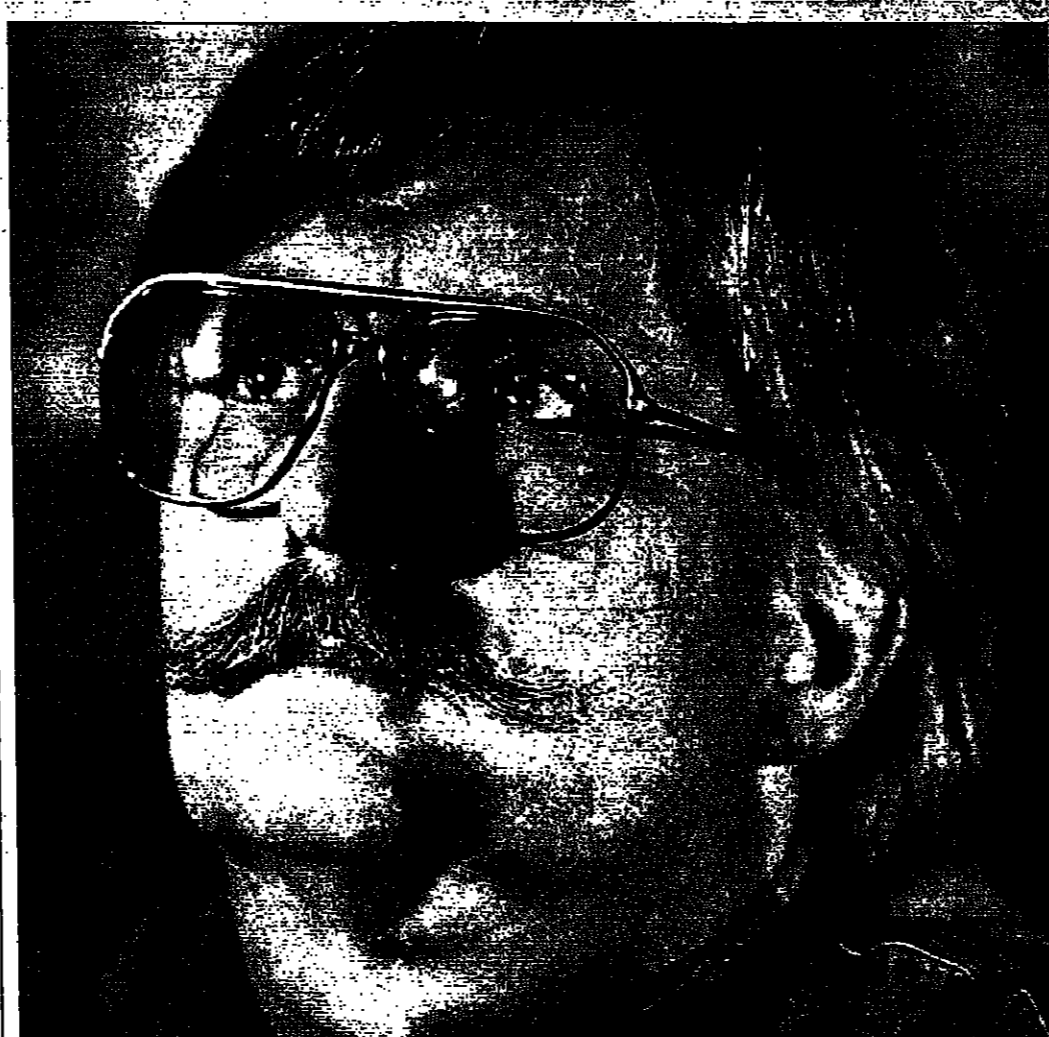
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NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING
Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996

people



Fred Goldman: Tireless in his pursuit of Simpson (Photograph: Lee Celano/Reuters)

Ultimatum to OJ: Confess and it won't cost you a cent

Reigniting the OJ Simpson drama just as it was dropping off the nation's front pages, the father of murdered waiter Ronald Goldman offered to drop all financial claims against Simpson yesterday in exchange for a public confession.

"All I ever wanted was justice," said Fred Goldman, who, together with his ex-wife, won \$21m damages against Simpson in a civil suit which concluded earlier this week. "It's never been an issue about money," Mr Goldman said yesterday as he insisted he did not want to "play games".

But his extraordinary offer promised to raise the public pressure on Simpson since a jury unanimously found him liable in the killings of Ron Goldman and his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson. Almost all the jurors, in interviews since the trial, have said they considered Mr Simpson not just technically responsible for the killings, but "100 per cent" guilty of murder, with the evidence against him far beyond a "reasonable doubt". "Finding O.J. Simpson liable of the murders and acting with oppression and malice was one of the easiest decisions I have ever had to make," said juror Laura Fast-Khazaei, 27, after the trial.

The jurors' comments only added to the widespread public perception that Simpson got away with a grisly double murder. He has been filmed joking and laughing on the golf course this week, and reportedly watched the final verdicts in a club bar with his golfing buddies. His lawyers did not return calls for comment yesterday.

Mr Goldman told the Associated Press yesterday: "If he wanted to sign a confession with all the details of his crime and broadcast it all over the country and publish it all over the nation, I would drop the judgement."

Mr Goldman, the driving force behind the civil suit against Simpson, and his most vociferous public accuser, first raised the idea in an interview with a Dallas-based Christian radio station. He said he had borrowed it in turn from a talk show in Los Angeles, where the right-wing radio hosts have aimed at barage of attacks on Simpson. Asked if it was likely to happen, he said, "easy to say, easy to do, never going to happen. This person hasn't taken responsibility for any of his actions through his lifetime."

Tim Cornwell, Los Angeles

Social worker wins award for exposing abuse

Alison Taylor, the former social worker who blew the whistle on the child abuse scandal in North Wales, has won an award from the Campaign for Freedom of Information in recognition of those who have fought to overcome official secrecy.

Mrs Taylor (right) was dismissed from her job as manager of a home in Gwynedd for trying to expose abuse affecting as many as 2,000 children, and refused to accept a financial settlement containing a gagging clause. When she challenged her sacking at an industrial tribunal she won an out-of-court settlement without a secrecy clause, and continued to campaign to get the allegations heard publicly.

She subsequently made approaches to the Welsh Office, the social services inspectorate and others but these were unsuccessful.

In 1991, she took a dossier of allegations from more than 100 children to the police, and a police inquiry later led to the conviction of seven care workers. Finally, a



judicial inquiry was set up and last month began taking evidence about the child abuse.

In recognition of her stand, the Campaign said: "Alison Taylor's refusal to be silenced has been one of the critical factors in finally bringing the scandal into the light." Mrs Taylor is now a successful novelist.

Another of the annual awards, presented last night, went to the Tory MP Quentin Davies, for his efforts to ensure there was no cover-up over the Willets affair and the Scott report. Jojo Moyes

Iran refuses to condemn bounty on Rushdie

Iran was angrily criticised by the Government yesterday after it emerged that the bounty on Salman Rushdie's head had been increased from \$2m to \$2.5m, about £1.5m.

Despite official claims that it had nothing to do with increasing the reward for fulfilling the fatwa, or death sentence, on the author, the Foreign Office called upon President Hashemi Rafsanjani to publicly condemn it - something the Iranian leader has so far failed to do.

The reward was increased by the 15 Khordad Foundation, a shadowy organisation which Iran claims is independent.

President Rafsanjani has insisted that the comments do not reflect official policy. His government says it cannot overturn the fatwa but it has given an undertaking not to send agents to kill him.

The Foreign Office said in a statement yesterday that it did not accept the Iranian assurances and demanded more preventative action from President Rafsanjani.

Steve Boggan

Snowdon's lover killed herself while depressed

Lord Snowdon's former lover, Ann Hills, killed herself with a massive overdose of paracetamol which was washed down with wine, an inquest heard yesterday.

The 55-year-old divorced mother-of-two probably committed suicide "on the spur of the moment" because she was depressed at her inability to have long-lasting relationships with men, Westminster Coroner's Court was told.

The body of Mrs Hills was found by her father Elliott Philipp, 81, on the roof of her flat in the West End of London on the afternoon of New Year's Day.

Police were called by friends who were concerned they could not contact Mrs Hills, a freelance journalist. Despite an extensive search they failed to find her body, which was hidden by a chimney. Her father found her body in a kneeling position later that day.

Her brother, Alan Philipp told the inquest Mrs Hills had been divorced since 1981. She had worked hard and was quite successful but although she had many friends, her inability to secure lasting male friendships may have made her concerned about her future happiness, he said.

Coroner Dr Paul Knapman said Mrs Hills had spent Christmas in Norfolk with her ex-husband and sons. Mrs Hills' GP, Professor Patrick Pietroni, said she had spoken of her unhappiness at times but had never exhibited signs of depression and he had never prescribed medication for this.

Pathologist Dr Ian Hill said Mrs Hills had taken "a very substantial overdose of paracetamol" as well as the tranquilliser Temazepam in a therapeutic amount with the equivalent of two glasses of wine.

briefing

MOTORING

Rover supermini crashes to bottom of car survey

The reputation of the Rover 100, shown in Department of Transport tests to be the least "safe" of the superminis, suffered another dent yesterday, when it was voted bottom of its class and described as "old and sad in every way". The damning verdict was given in a national survey by *BBC Top Gear* magazine, which placed the VW Polo top of its category.

There was more bad news for Rover in the coupé class, where the Rover 800 came bottom and was considered "cramped, dated and ugly". The "striking looks" of the Fiat Coupé took it to the top of this category. Top family car was the Fiat Bravo/Brava, while bottom was the Lada Riva. The Ford Mondeo - "simply a good car" to drive - topped the medium car range, with the Daewoo Espero bottom.

SCIENCE

Black holes are universal

Evidence of a huge black hole at the heart of a nearby galaxy makes it more likely that the mysterious objects are a common feature of the universe. Astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope discovered that mass equivalent to about 3.4 million suns was squashed into a region only about one light year across at the centre of the galaxy Messier 32.

M32 is a small companion of the nearest large spiral galaxy to our own Milky Way - the Andromeda galaxy, 2.2 million light years away. Black holes, thought to form when massive stars shrink at the end of their lives, have such a strong gravity that nothing can escape from them, not even light. They distort time and space to such a degree that the normal laws of physics break down.

The findings are published in the science journal *Nature* by researchers from the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.



WELFARE

Benefit reform fails to cut costs

Attempts to cut back sharply on the amount of benefit paid to people unable to work through disability or illness have proved much harder than expected, with only half the expected number of claimants being disqualified from benefits, according to a report by the National Audit Office.

The Government had hoped to make savings of £415m, out of spending of around £7.5bn, through introducing the incapacity benefit in April 1995 to replace sickness and invalidity benefits because the new system had tighter rules designed to bar many people from the benefit. However, savings were £135m less than forecast because the Benefits Agency, which administers the benefit, was unable to process as many cases as planned and was unable to disallow as many claims as expected.

Christian Wolmar

SCIENCE

Is the world getting weirder?

The FT Index rose by 2.9 per cent last year. This may not be good news for investors, for this FT Index is not the usual economic indicator, but the "weirdness index" calculated by the *Fortean Times*, the journal of strange and inexplicable phenomena. For the past few years, it has published an index based on the number of weird stories spotted by their readers in the pages of the world's press. And the figures show that 1996 was 2.9 per cent up on 1995.

The publishers add the reassuring information that the figures reflect an interest in weirdness rather than necessarily weirdness itself. Indeed, were it not for the attacks on farm animals by the Puerto Rican Gostucker and the discovery of possible life on Mars, the index would scarcely be higher than in the previous year. With Spontaneous Human Combustion going through a relatively damp patch and Swarmings considerably down, the evidence of a general upward trend in weirdness is weak.

William Hartston

THE INDEPENDENT

HOLD THE FRONT PAGE

Next Monday *The Independent* introduces **MEDIA+**, a new section devoted to the ever-expanding communications business. As television revolutionises itself, newspapers are in bitter battle and manipulators and advertisers will tell you what you need to know, whether you are a bombarded civilian, a media professional or a media wannabe. Monday's *Independent* (rich in media appointments) is an edition you miss at your peril.

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Surreal moment as rare Man Ray is found

Matthew Brace

A rare and valuable print by the American artist and photographer Man Ray has been unearthed in an attic, having lain hidden for more than 25 years.

The Man Ray Rayogram - a camera-less photograph taken by placing objects on light-sensitive paper and exposing them to light from above - is inscribed by the photographer on the back and marked "original".

The find has excited Sotheby's, in London, where the photograph and 248 others, including prints by the American landscape photographer Edward Weston, will go to auction on 2 May. The Man Ray alone is expected to fetch upwards of £30,000.

The auctioneers' photographic expert, Philippe Garner, a senior director at Sotheby's, said yesterday that the discovery of the collection was "possibly the most exciting group of photographs to have turned up in this way in the last 30 years".

Man Ray lived in Paris for much of his working life. He was linked to the Dada and Surrealist movements although he was also known as an experimenter and to a large extent, reinvented photography. He died in 1976.

Mr Garner said the collection was put together by Helene Anderson, a German photographer who gathered most of the photographs in the 1920s and 1930s before the sweep of Nazism stemmed much of the free flow of art in Germany.

In 1939 Anderson boxed up her collection and sent it eastwards, out of harm's way, to her parents in Silesia. Later, as the Russians advanced, the boxes were moved again, this time to Frankfurt where Anderson settled until her death in 1971.

"Helene Anderson had an exceptional eye and understanding for the dynamic developments... in photography in Germany and elsewhere during the 20s and 30s and set about building a collection to illustrate the finest achievements of the avant-garde," said Mr Garner.

"When she died, her son knew he was left with a number of boxes but did not know what was inside them. Only recently, 25 years after his mother's death, did he realise he might have something important."

The whole collection is expected to fetch something in the region of £650,000.

Shape of things to come: Man Ray's 1920s Original Rayogram, set to fetch at least £30,000 at auction in May Photograph: Sotheby's

Men's magazines to disappear as WH Smith wipes top shelf clean

Marianne Macdonald
Media Correspondent

WH Smith, Britain's biggest and most powerful newsagent, is to stop selling "top-shelf" magazines in its high-street shops from next month, it announced yesterday.

A spokeswoman denied the move was prompted by moral concerns, saying it was the result of a review of sales of the 1,500 magazines it stocks.

Penhouse, Playboy, Loaded and For Women were among the poorest performers. Customers will still be able to order the magazines to arrive within a day or so at the shops, and they would still be sold in WH Smith concessions at stations and airports.

"We have to make a decision about what we have got room for... we try to make room for the ones that sell best," the spokeswoman said. "It's nothing to do with ethics. If it was, then we would have taken them out of all stores."

"Our policy is very much that if people want to read something we make it available. We don't make judgments about what people should and should not read." The review is a regular feature at WH Smith, which has continuously reassessed the performance of titles. Last year, 50 new magazines came on to the market, and its 450 high-street shops have run out of space to display them all.

As a result, the company said yesterday, 269 titles, including "top-shelf" magazines, would be dropped. The others were mostly specialist or trade titles. "Some of those sold as little as three copies," the spokeswoman said. "The suggestion that all the top-shelf are going to be dropped. This section

has been being dropped for a period of time - we used to stock a lot more. Those four have hung on, if you like, but they have now slipped to the bottom of the list."

Yesterday different explanations were being offered for WH Smith's move. One is that research has shown customers at its high-street outlets are predominantly women or families in the 25-45 range - not natural readers of such magazines. Others said the move was, in spite of the company's claims,

Monthly circulations	
Magazine "Wall Over 100,000"	(figures give more precise figures)
Playboy	46,000
GO	131,074
For Women	60,000
Esquire	107,058
FHM	181,000
Loaded	238,955
Penhouse	33,519
Penhouse plus	125,000

due to moral considerations.

Ruth Corbett, who edits For Women, a monthly Playboy-style magazine aimed at women, said: "I feel very cross about this. It's rather silly in this day and age. It seems they are on some sort of moral crusade."

"They're probably saying there's no demand but we think there's a huge demand for the magazine. We have letters arriving every day asking us where the magazine can be bought."

Ms Corbett added that WH Smith was hypocritical in its attitude. It was happy to stock erotic novels for women, which have been soaring in popularity recently.

"Women are reading those

books on the Tube, which you'd never have seen in the past. But at WH Smith, when it comes to showing pictures of men showing all their bits, rather than just text, they don't like it."

Others speculated that the move was also triggered by the new trend toward heavily sexual, but "respectable" men's magazines such as Loaded and FHM. The trend for laddish titles has seen their circulations soar in the past couple of years.

The Internet also increasingly offers an accessible outlet for soft and hard-core, with services which allow users to watch models stripping on-screen in obedience to typed instructions (and a hefty payment). Soft-core pornography is also available on cable and satellite services.

Carl Snitcher, the chief executive of Paul Raymond Publications, which publishes Playboy, said he was not overly concerned by WH Smith's decision, however, because it would be unlikely to affect circulation.

"We would have preferred it hadn't happened, but it will not have a substantial effect on our magazine because only about 1 per cent of our total sale is through high-street stores."

But Comag, the UK distributors of Playboy, said they were surprised by the magazine being dropped, because it was now being marketed as a lifestyle title. "If you compare it to FHM or Loaded, there's probably the same amount of nudity in it," a spokeswoman said. "It's even more odd given the huge success of Playboy in southern Ireland, where it launched a year ago after being banned for 36 years. Sales there now make up 45 per cent of total UK sales."



Non-erogenous zone: The reach for titillation draws to a close Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Stephen Hawking's bet disappears into a black hole

Matthew Brace

Professor Stephen Hawking - regarded by some as one of Albert Einstein's intellectual successors - has lost a six-year-old bet with colleagues.

Hawking made a wager with two professors at the California Institute of Technology that "maked singularities" - variations on a cosmological phe-

nomenon believed to lurk at the hearts of black holes - could not exist. Now it seems they might.

The New York Times reported yesterday that Professor Hawking conceded defeat last week "on a technicality" to fellow physicists John Preskill and Kip Thorne. The stake was \$104 (£100), plus an item of clothing "embroidered with a suitable concessionary

... and for the uninitiated

A singularity is defined as a mathematical point at which space and time are infinitely distorted, where matter is infinitely dense, and where the normal rules of relativistic physics and quantum mechanics break down.

message." Although he could not prove his disbelief in naked singularities, Professor Hawking, the author of the best-selling book *A Brief History of Time*, proposed his bet at one such meeting in 1991.

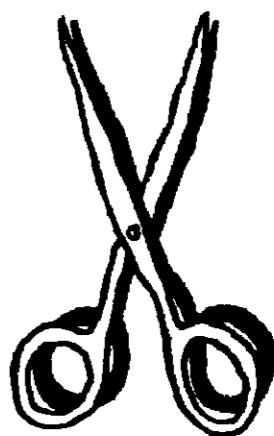
Because of its far-reaching

theoretical implications, news of the bet spread widely among physicists.

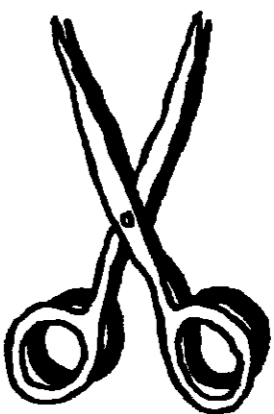
Although no light nor any other kind of signal can escape from black holes, half-dozen or so have been revealed by their gravitational effects on nearby stars. Black holes have also betrayed their presence by sucking in matter from nearby.

Singularities are believed to lurk hidden at the centre of black holes. A naked singularity would be a singularity bereft of a concealing black-hole shell, and therefore visible, in principle, to outside observers.

Professors Preskill and Thorne won the bet because recent computer calculations have shown that naked singularities could, in theory, be created as a star collapsed.



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news

Missing jail officer's body found in river

Steve Boggan

The body of the missing White-moor prison officer Peter Curran was found yesterday as speculation grew that he might have been involved in supplying drugs to prisoners.

Police who dragged a car from a waterway in Cambridgeshire confirmed that the badly decomposed remains were Mr Curran's. He vanished in March 1995, two days after being suspended for smuggling toiletries into the prison.

There has been speculation - but no evidence - since his disappearance that he may have been involved in the attempted breakout by five IRA prisoners and a convicted robber from White-moor in September 1994. However, sources close to the jail say they suspect Mr Curran, 38, had been acting as a courier for an outside drugs gang.

The car was pulled from a deep man-made dike Chatteris. A Home Office pathologist conducted a post-mortem ex-

amination yesterday and confirmed that the remains were those of the prison officer.

Mr Curran is the second White-moor officer within a month to be found drowned in such a manner. Marcia Whitehurst, 37, was killed when her car plunged into a river near Wisbech after giving evidence at the trial of the White-moor escapees. The police described her death as a "tragic accident".

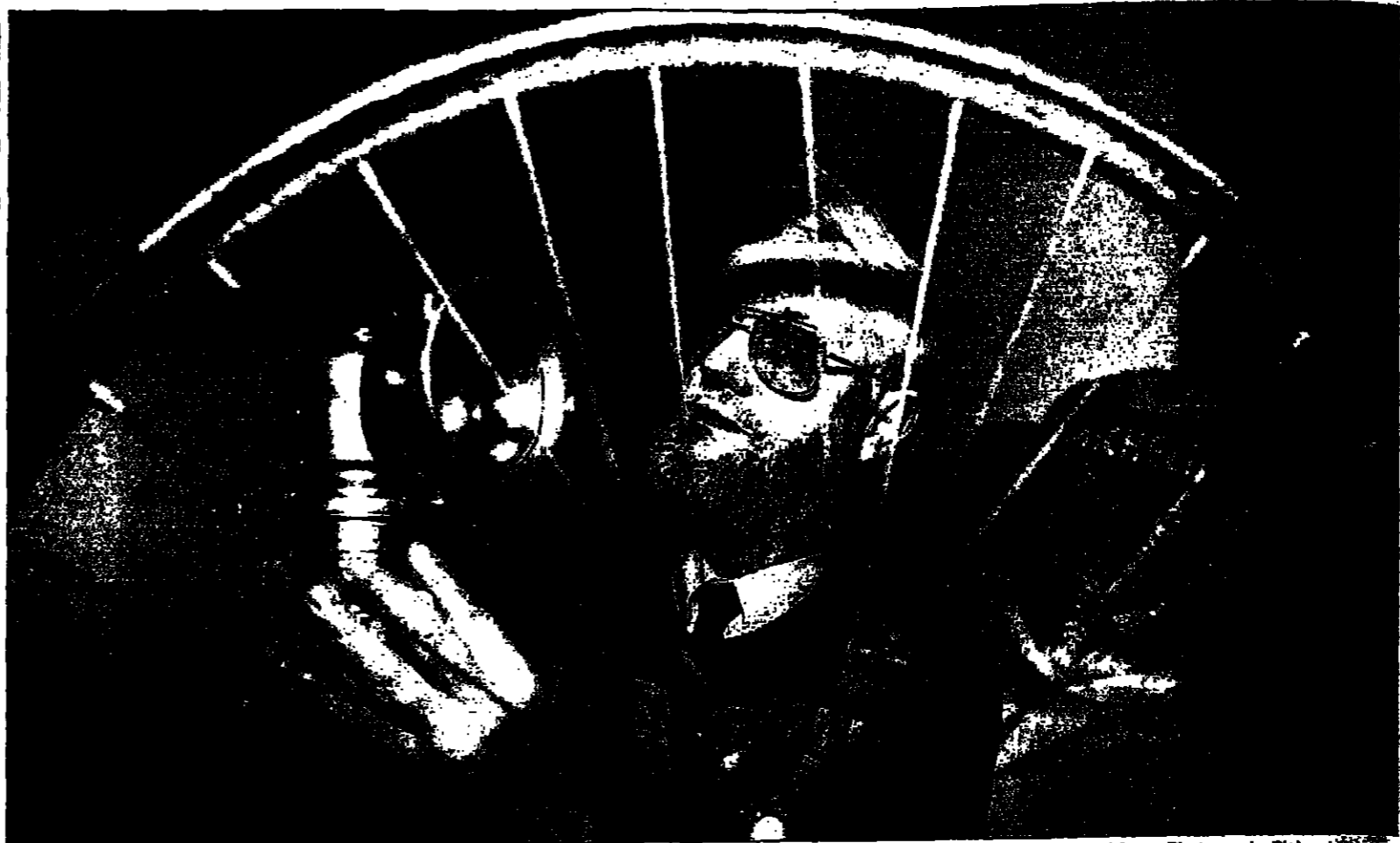
Prison sources are not the only people who believe third parties may have been involved in Mr Curran's death. In the days before he disappeared he told his wife, Christine, that he was afraid because of something he had done at the jail. Then, on a Sunday, he "popped out" without a coat and never came back.

In an interview earlier this month with the *Fenland Citizen* newspaper, Mrs Curran said she believed he went out to meet someone and suggested his disappearance had something to do with his job. He told her about supplying the toiletries but

"hinted there was something else". Last night, she told the BBC: "I don't believe this was just a road-traffic accident ... I think as I did before that something else was going on here. It is one accident too many."

Mrs Curran said she believed her husband was about to "blow the whistle" - a belief that tallies with prison officers' opinions. One source said: "They had him for the toiletries, but they believed there was alcohol involved and possibly worse. They believed he was prepared to give a statement, but that could be what got him killed."

Mark Freeman of the Prison Officers' Association, said staff at the jail had been outraged by allegations made by Michael Mansfield QC, who represented one of the IRA prisoners, that staff had colluded with the escapees. "A police investigation is being carried out and they will no doubt examine the links between the two deaths of the officers. But it is far too early to say what this may be," he said.



Wheels of time: David Higman, of the National Bicycle Exhibition which opens at Llandrindod Wells in March, with a 1934 lamp. Photograph: Richard Stiles

Husband gets life for family killing

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

The husband of murdered teacher Eve Howells must carry the major burden of blame for the killing, a judge said yesterday as he jailed him for life and ordered his two sons to indefinite detention at Her Majesty's Pleasure.

David Howells, 48, was not present when his wife was killed but Mr Justice Allott condemned him as the instigator of the crime, and his recommendation to the Home Secretary on the minimum jail term to be served would take account of that. Recommendations on the boys would reflect that Glenn, 17, who repeatedly struck his mother with a hammer, was the actual killer. John, 16, who disposed of the murder weapon and his brother's bloodstained clothes, had an "active if less crucial" role, the judge said.

A jury decided on Tuesday that the father and sons had plotted the killing together after the boys suffered years of abuse from the history and religious affairs teacher. Mr Justice Allott then took the unusual course of giving the three 24 hours to confess the exact roles they had played before deciding what tariffs to recommend. "I don't know the whole truth," he said.

The period of reflection resulted in Glenn Howells admitting for the first time that his father had been involved in discussions about killing his mother in a mock burglary - but David Howells persisted in denying active involvement.

Gary Burrell QC, acting for Glenn, told the court: "The reality is that none of us will ever know the full story." But Glenn should be sentenced on the basis that the killing, in August 1995, "would never have taken place without David Howells' prior approval, without his prior knowledge, and without some, implicit at least, encouragement."

Simon Hawkesworth QC, counsel for David Howells, said Mr Howells denied active complicity in any plan to kill his wife. "He does accept, as he must, that he failed to act to prevent this tragedy and that it was in his power to do so. To that extent he recognises that in his role as father, he failed his sons and there's a heavy moral responsibility."

But the judge told him that he had led his sons into doing what they did. "There cannot be anything more vile than to get your sons to kill their mother, unless it can be to confront cheerfully their long detention while you went free."

"Yours is by far the greatest culpability and I shall reflect that in my recommendation." The father was playing a pub darts match when the murder was carried out, enabling him to put forward an alibi defence in court.

Aiden Marran QC, acting for John, said the younger son had been damaged by the bizarre behaviour of his mother, but there was also a sinister element - his father. John's increasing isolation and desolation had led him to rely and depend more and more heavily on his father.

Mr Marran called a consultant forensic psychiatrist, Dr Peter Wood, who told the court that John had become significantly behaviourally disturbed by his mother's behaviour and "chronically dependent" on his brother and father.

From the time John was 10, a fantasy had begun of how the boys might achieve a "life without mum", and they began to think about causing her death. The ideas had become firmer as time went on.

"In a positive way, and later more actively, his father did not discourage him and later probably encouraged him to find a radical solution to their problems. It was an unbalanced situation and as the youngest member of the family, John was very vulnerable," Dr Wood said.

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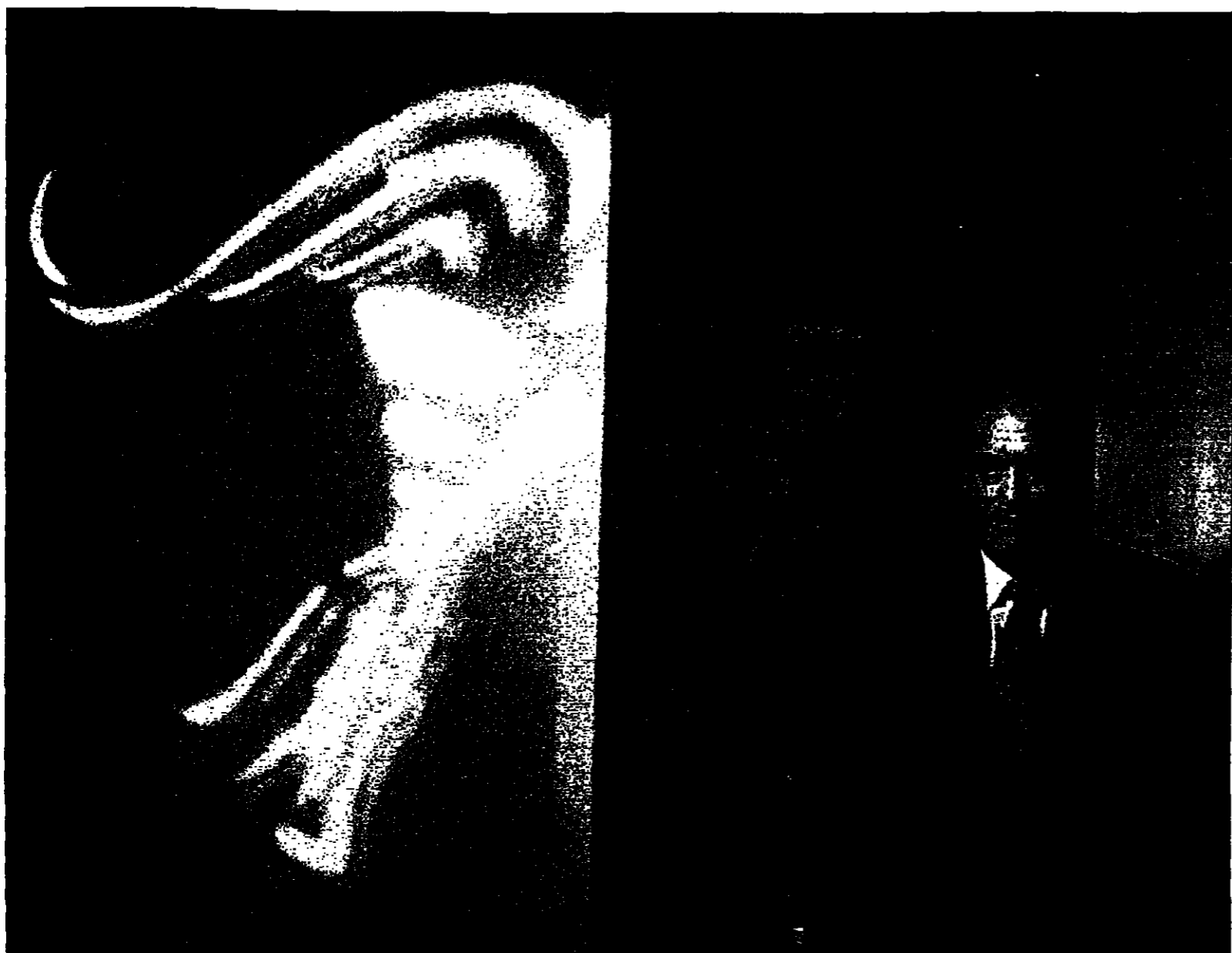
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politics



Keeping council: The Conservative Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, at a party news conference in London yesterday where he refused to be drawn on a date for the general election. "Whenever the Prime Minister announces a date, we will be ready," Dr Mawhinney said. Photograph: Tom Pison

LibDems in confusion over bonus

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Liberal Democrat plans for a double Christmas pension in December to replace the "misery" £10 Christmas bonus were thrown into disarray last night when officials denied it was a manifesto pledge.

The party's social security spokeswoman, Liz Lynne, said the Christmas bonus was "an insult which we want to redress by paying a double pension in the first week of December."

But within minutes of publishing a policy document on the elderly saying it was Liberal Democrat policy to give pensioners a double pension in the first week of December, officials were stressing it was not a commitment.

"It is still in the running to get into the manifesto but we are having a costing exercise. Whether it will get in, we cannot say yet," said an official.

Officials also had to correct Ms Lynne's figures after she told a Westminster news conference it would cost £580m to implement. The real estimated net cost was £440m, after deducting the cost of the £10 bonus, which would be scrapped.

The confusion over Ms Lynne's apparent pledge to pensioners, repeated on BBC radio, follows strains between the Rochdale MP and the Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, over his strategy for moving closer to Labour, which she opposes. Officials

denied the launch of the policy document, *A Fair Deal for Older People*, was being used as a lever to force a higher spending policy on the Liberal Democrat leadership.

Harriet Harman, the Labour spokeswoman on social security, set out Labour's alternative with a boost to occupational pensions, through "stakeholder pensions".

It came as the Treasury last night was accused by Labour of drafting slap-dash legislation on the budget in an attempt to close tax loopholes in the run-up to the general election.

After securing a series of concessions from Philip Oppenheim, the Exchequer Secretary, Dawn Primarolo, the Labour spokeswoman said: "The wheels are falling off the Finance Bill and it shows that the Bill was badly drafted."

Alistair Darling, the Treasury spokesman who is leading for Labour on the Bill, said many of the problems arose from a note sent to Customs and Excise by William Waldegrave, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, seeking suggestions on increasing the tax revenue.

"The call went out and we have seen the unintended consequences of some of the measures they have introduced. This Finance Bill looks as if it was done on the hoof."

The Government insisted it was normal to introduce amendments after consultation, but Labour said the changes went beyond "tidying up" measures.

Queen approves sex Bill debate

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

The Queen has given her consent for peers to debate a proposal that royal daughters as well as sons should be able to succeed to the throne.

Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare put forward the motion, which would allow a future eldest child of Prince William to be able to inherit the crown regardless of its gender.

The Lord Steward of the Household, crossbencher Viscount Ridley, announced the decision at the start of business in the Lords yesterday, though Lord Archer was not in the House.

However, there is too little parliamentary time left before the general election for the Throne Bill to stand a chance of becoming law.

It is opposed by a number of peers, including the Queen's former private secretary, Lord Charteris of Amisfield. When Lord Archer asked the Lords to request the Queen's consent in December, they took the rare

step of contesting his move but it was approved by 74 votes to 53.

A similar measure to allow eldest children, regardless of gender, to inherit peerages was blocked in December 1994.

The Queen's consent for Lord Archer's Bill to be debated does not necessarily indicate Royal support for the measure, but the Palace is understood to prefer that such a far-reaching change should be the result of a government Bill rather than backbench legislation.

"The Lords' convention is to give all Bills, whether government or backbench, a formal first reading and an unopposed second reading and not to block backbench measures from progressing to the Commons."

If opponents of Lord Archer's Bill do force a vote during the measure's later stages in the Lords, the government and opposition front benches are likely to abstain, while allowing their peers a free vote.

Brown warns of no-work ghettos under Tories

Anthony Bevins
and Diane Coyle

The spread of lawless, inner-city ghettos would be threatened by the re-election of the Tories for a fifth term, shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown will warn today.

In a speech concentrating on the positive action Labour would take to get people back into work, and reform the welfare state, Mr Brown will spell out the downside dangers of another election victory for John Major.

Against a background of yesterday's further fall in unemployment, he will argue that the figures disguise the fact that one-fifth of all non-pensioner households have no one in work – and that the Tories propose no action to tackle that problem.

"The danger is that the re-election of the Tories would risk the creation of a fifth-term underclass that would take us down the road of America, with no-work and no-go inner city areas plagued by lawlessness," Mr Brown will say.

The warning echoes similar predictions from senior Tories, including the Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine, who

wrote 10 years ago in his book, *Where There's a Will*: "Against a background of high unemployment, the invitation to crime becomes more appealing. Idleness becomes a resentment that gives crime an indefensible normality."

Anticipating more Conservative attacks on the windfall tax – the £5bn-plus levy on the excess profits of privatised utilities, Labour last night published the legal opinion that it was watertight.

The opinion, signed by Michael Beloff QC, said there could be no challenge under domestic law; it should not attract a challenge under European law, "but, if it did, such challenge would fail"; and would withstand any challenge under the European Convention of Human Rights.

Yesterday's good news on unemployment was mitigated by another Bank of England swipe at the reluctance of the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, to raise interest rates – and Opposition endorsement of the warning from Niall FitzGerald, chairman of Unilever, that future United Kingdom investment could be at risk if Britain opted out

of European monetary union.

As Unilever and its subsidiaries are the largest corporate employers in Wirral South, the by-election battleground, Mr FitzGerald's warning could not have come at a more politically sensitive moment – a point aggravated by the fact that the Chancellor was campaigning in the constituency yesterday.

But the warning also coincided with publication of the Bank of England's quarterly Inflation Report, in which Mervyn King, the Bank's chief economist, said: "There should be a rise in interest rates now. The longer you delay, the more interest rates will have to go up."

News of a 68,700 drop in the number of unemployment benefit claimants last month, taking the jobless rate down to 6.5 per cent, and a faster pace of earnings growth, added weight to the Bank's claim that the economy was expanding too rapidly. However, the combination of the political timetable and mixed signals on the economy means interest rates will almost certainly not rise ahead of the election.

Bank pressure on Clarke, page 20

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Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Ms Duff said that watching so many violent films did not appear to make the boys violent. However, their addiction to television and games showed their avoidance of reality. "They are flying fantasy kites. They don't expect to get what they want," she said. "Essentially, they are deferring growing up."

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However, the combination of political timidity and national on the economy may mean interest rates will almost certainly not rise ahead of the demand.

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news

First the house, then the Bentley; now Lloyd-Webber empties the cellar

The composer Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber could be £2m richer if thousands of bottles of wine from his collection sell at auction in London.

He has collected wine for decades and Sotheby's has 18,000 bottles from the cellars of his homes in England and France to sell on 20 May. Serena Sutcliffe, head of Sotheby's International Wine Department, called it "the greatest single wine collection ever to appear at auction... it represents the wine-lover's dream cellar."

Every bottle fell into the category of being the world's most desirable wine, she said. Most of it is French, with a concentration on Burgundy and Bordeaux, as well as champagnes from Dom Perignon and Bollinger.

The sale includes 10 cases of Château Latour 1982 and 24 cases of Margaux 1982. 10 bottles of 1945 Château Lafite and six bottles of Château Margaux from 1900.

Collectors will pay huge prices for the correct vintage and records are frequently set.

Books and television

programmes on wine have helped create a collectors' market.

■ In September, a bottle of Château d'Yquem 1865, a sweet white French wine, sold at Sotheby's for £5,280.

■ Prices of the top clarets have rocketed in the past two or three years, but some experts say the boom may not continue for much longer.

■ The influence of various wine writers has helped push up the value of some wines and wealthy Far Eastern and Middle Eastern investors have come into the market in a big way recently.

■ One Far Eastern wine-lover spent a total of £68,530 on bottles of a celebrated claret called Château Le Pin at Christie's in London in April. He was buying them to drink.

■ Experts warn: "Wine is not an advisable investment unless you are very clued up on the subject. If you don't know what you are doing, you can really come unstuck. It is very easy to get ripped off in the wine business."

■ Generally speaking, the older the wine, the higher the risk.



Golden harvest: Serena Sutcliffe, of Sotheby's, with a bottle of Château d'Yquem 1900 from the Lloyd Webber collection, to be auctioned in May

Photograph: John Voos

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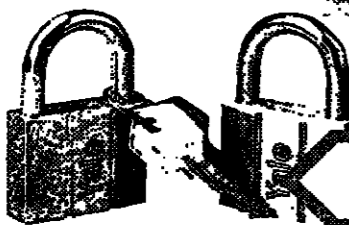
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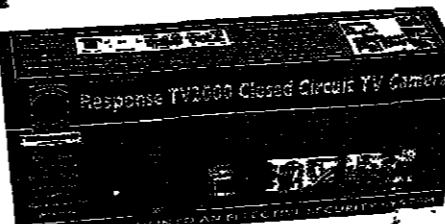
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Vegetative patients should die, say doctors

Liz Hunt
Health Editor

The overwhelming majority of doctors who treat patients in the deep, coma-like state known as persistent vegetative state (PVS), believe that treatment should be withheld in some circumstances to allow patients to die.

In the first comprehensive survey of more than 1,000 neurologists, neurosurgeons and other specialists, there was more than 90 per cent support for not treating acute infections and other life-threatening conditions in PVS patients where "appropriate."

The survey, by the Centre of Medical Law and Ethics at King's College London, reveals widespread discrepancies in hospital policy and in the medical care of PVS patients.

The researchers call on the Government to act urgently to collate information on PVS patients in UK hospitals, how they are treated and by whom, and to formalise guidelines on their care.

Almost 75 per cent of doctors surveyed said it can "sometimes" be appropriate to withdraw artificial feeding and hydration from such patients. Contrary to advice given by the British Medical Association, a majority of doctors said that withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration could be considered within a year of PVS diagnosis.

More than a third said it would be appropriate to consider withdrawal after the patient had been in PVS for six months.

The findings of the survey conflict with BMA advice that treatment-limiting decisions should not be considered until the patient has been in PVS for a year or more.

PVS is used to describe patients with severe brain damage who spend time awake and asleep; who show no meaningful response to things around

them, and whose movements and reactions are reflex. They can breathe on their own but most have to be fed through a tube.

It is estimated that there are between 1,000 and 1,500 PVS patients in the UK, and since the 1993 High Court case of Hillsborough victim, Tony Bland, the condition has been the focus of much public debate.

There have now been nine cases in England since Bland, when the courts have approved withdrawal of life-sustaining measures from PVS patients. The most controversial cases have centred on withdrawal of food and water.

There has also been public concern about misdiagnosis of PVS after a study published last year found that 17 patients diagnosed as PVS were in fact aware of themselves and their surroundings, and could communicate in limited ways with their carers and families.

This raises the possibility that people from whom treatment, food and water were withdrawn, and allowed to die, were not in PVS.

The survey, which attracted 1,027 respondents also found that three-quarters disagreed with court involvement in PVS cases, although a similar proportion agreed with the Bland decision to allow him to die.

However, doctors still appear reluctant to give weight to an advance directive made by patients in decisions about withdrawing artificial nutrition and hydration, the survey revealed.

Pat Walsh, acting director of the Centre of Medical Law and Ethics said: "There is a pressing need for further research to unpack the implicit moral reasoning behind what doctors are doing."

■ **Doctors' views on the management of patients in persistent vegetative state (PVS):** a UK study, is available from the Centre of Medical Law and Ethics, King's College, London. Tel: 0171 873 2382.

DAILY POEM

Cracks

By Ruth Biddood

In Penylan Road, Dinas Road, Pendref, pavements are cracking. People there grumble, but are not much perturbed at this little encroachment of chaos. Washing cars, weeding paths, they cherish as long as they may, all controllable things, and go on making small memories.

Pavements are cracking. The lines form a pattern like rivers or roads on maps. Here and there through the cracks creep small plants, embellishments such as old cartographers added in corners and margins - pygmy beasts, fruit, cherubs, flowers, to complement their hazardous projections with forms of tenacious life.

"Cracks" is from Ruth Biddood's recent volume, *The Fluent Moment* (Seren). Born in Glamorgan in 1922, she now lives in Powys and has published seven poetry collections. *The Fluent Moment* costs £5.95 from Seren at Poetry Wales Press Ltd., First Floor, 2 Wyndham Street, Bridgend, Mid-Glamorgan CF31 1EF.



Roisin McAliskey at a 1994 Belfast funeral, and her mother as Bernadette Devlin in 1971 in Fleet Street, London, protesting at media coverage of Ulster

IRA suspect to be handcuffed during birth

Steve Beggan

A pregnant IRA suspect being held in prison pending extradition to Germany has been told she must give birth in handcuffs and cannot care for her baby in prison.

Roisin McAliskey, 25, daughter of the former nationalist MP Bernadette McAliskey, is being treated as a category A exceptional-risk prisoner at Holloway jail in London, even though she is more than six months pregnant and has no record of violence.

Her treatment is causing growing concern among MPs and civil rights groups and is being watched closely by Amnesty International, which has issued

an "urgent action bulletin" claiming that the conditions of her detention "may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment".

Ms McAliskey is wanted for questioning by the German authorities over a mortar-bomb attack on the British Army base at Osnabrück last June, although she says she has never been to Germany. An extradition hearing in London today is expected to rubber stamp the handover to the Germans, but lengthy legal appeals will result in her still being in Holloway when her child is born.

The Home Office said last week that it had received no request from Ms McAliskey to care for her child in prison. However, she has been told that, as a category A prisoner, she may not use the prison's baby-care facilities while other inmates are there, ruling out the possibility of looking after her own baby.

Her mother told *The Independent* that she was visited by a senior prison official last week and told that she would have to "face up to some realities" over the birth of the child.

"He was as humane as he could be, but he said that she would have to make some practical adjustments as a category A prisoner," Mrs McAliskey said. "He said because the Home Office had designated her an exceptional escape risk, she would have to be handcuffed during the birth."

"He said she will be handcuffed to a 'birthing partner' which I sincerely hope will be a female rather than male prison officer. She was told that because of her designation, she could not mix with other prisoners and so couldn't use the mother-and-baby unit."

"Having the baby taken away is something she refuses to contemplate. I'm completely horrified by the prospect. She has never been in trouble in her life and all of a sudden they're putting her through this nightmare."

If the baby is taken away, Mrs McAliskey said it would be cared for by its father, Sean McCotter, the brother of Liam McCotter, a convicted IRA terrorist. But she added: "I'm afraid he would have trouble breast-feeding it."

The extradition warrant for Ms McAliskey says she is suspected of attempted murder and illegally handling explosives. She was detained at the request of German anti-terrorist officers, who have been hunting at least five members of the IRA cell which fired three home-made mortars from the back of a van.

One of the mortar bombs exploded near fuel tanks at the

base, which is the headquarters of 4 Armoured Brigade, but no one was hurt.

Within days police had discovered the terrorists' hideout and named former Royal Engineer Michael Dickson, 31, who had served in Germany, as a suspect. They said they believed the gang had fled back to Ireland. It is understood that the Germans intend to allege that Ms McAliskey posed as Mr Dickson's wife.

Labour MP Kevin McNamara, the party's former spokesman on Northern Ireland, has visited Ms McAliskey in prison and said that he is concerned about the designation of a six-month pregnant woman, whose health has been questioned by doctors, as a high-risk prisoner. He has tabled questions in the Commons of Michael Howard, the Home



Mrs McAliskey: Horrified by daughter's 'nightmare'

Secretary, demanding information about her treatment.

"I believe this is quite outrageous," he said. "I thought we had heard the last of women being chained up in hospital. It is her designation that will result in the baby being taken away because, as Category A, she can't mix with the other mothers."

"To suggest she would try to escape is ridiculous. The physical endurance required for a heavily pregnant and ill woman to escape from a prison would be quite extraordinary."

Amnesty's urgent-action bulletin said: "The outcome of this possible decision to separate the mother and baby would amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and would damage permanently the mother-child bonding relationship."

Cuts hitting RAF safety, officers say

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

The RAF is not ready for "even a minor combat role", and safety has been put at risk because of financial cutbacks and a shortage of spares, according to officers who have recently left the service.

An RAF technician will say on a television programme, which is to be screened tonight, that he had been told not to tell aircrews that certain wires in Tornados and Harriers might catch fire because of extra wear and tear.

The crews were not to be told about the wiring, called Kapton, he said, because "if there is a war, or even if there is not a war, and they know this cable may ignite, they will not go on; they will not be in the aircraft". The US Air Force decided to move away from using Kapton as long ago as 1988.

The Independent recently reported concern about the RAF's ability to keep its Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft in the air. The new evidence about front line strike aircraft is revealed in an episode of the Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme to be screened tonight.

The programme cites a confidential report by Air Chief Marshal Sir William Whitten warning that cuts in manpower were "biting deeply" into the RAF's ability to fulfil its

operational tasks. In interviews, senior officers warn of low morale and that aircraft are having to be cannibalised to keep a few flying.

Air Vice Marshal Boz Robinson, a former station commander at RAF Valley, Anglesey, who keeps in touch with the RAF as a light aircraft instructor, said: "The mood throughout the whole of the Air Force is 'What on earth is happening to us? We were a perfectly good air force. Why does all this have to happen?'"

Group Captain Neil Buckland, a senior RAF planner in the MoD until last year, said the RAF did not have the spares it needed to keep the planes it has flying and was forced to "cannibalise" them instead.

Flight Lieutenant James Archer, a Tornado pilot at RAF Leuchars, Fife, until last year said: "When I joined 43 Squadron at Leuchars, we probably had eight aeroplanes at the start of the day that were serviceable. Very quickly after that, sort of '93, '94, we were getting down to very bad situations. We were regularly seeing a good day being six aircraft and a bad day being one."

The most damning comment is from former Tornado pilot Squadron Leader Ed Smith. He said: "At the front line, true effectiveness is being reduced. We are not ready for even a minor combat role."

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Photograph: Reute

He reaffirmed to Georgia's parliament that Nato had no plans to deploy nuclear weapons in new member states in Eastern Europe. Georgia

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Korean upheaval: Corruption scandal shakes government in South, as defector leaves North reeling

Top Seoul politicians offer to resign over bribe claims

Sang-hun Choe
Associated Press

Seoul — South Korea's Prime Minister and his governing party chairman said yesterday they were ready to resign to take moral responsibility for a bribes-for-loans scandal.

"I believe the Prime Minister must take responsibility," Prime Minister Lee Soo Sung was quoted by his spokesman as telling a Cabinet meeting. "I have no intention to cling to my post."

Ahn Kwan Ki, Mr Lee's spokesman, said the Prime Minister held himself morally responsible, although he was not directly involved in the scandal, which centres on a bankrupt steel company.

Lee Hong Koo, chairman of the ruling New Korea Party, also told President Kim Young Sam that he was ready to resign, party officials said yesterday. Mr Lee had been seeking his party's nomination to run for president in an election scheduled for December.

It remained uncertain whether the President would accept the two leaders' offer to quit, officials said. The offers came shortly after



Centre of attention: Kim Woo Suk, who offered to resign as Home Affairs Minister, heading for the prosecutor's office in Seoul for questioning yesterday. Photograph: Reuters

prosecutors called in two close aides to President Kim for questioning about alleged involvement in the scandal. Before he appeared for questioning, the Home Minister, Kim Woo Suk, also offered to resign.

Also questioned yesterday was Hwang Byong Tae, a former ambassador to China and now a ruling party MP. Kwon Ro Gap, a close confidant of opposition presidential hopeful Kim Dae Jung, was

another politician questioned yesterday.

Two bank heads and two government MPs, including an aide to President Kim, have already been arrested on charges of taking bribes or

peddling influence for loans to bankrupt Hanbo Steel Industry Co.

Hanbo Steel, a flagship company of the Hanbo group, South Korea's 14th largest conglomerate, collapsed on 23 January with \$6bn debt, most-

ly in bank loans. Three other Hanbo subsidiaries also went under.

The Home Minister headed the Construction Ministry in 1993-1994, when Hanbo obtained a government permit to build a steel plant on re-

claimed land. Mr Hwang was ambassador to China in 1993-1995, when Hanbo was looking into investments in steel and construction projects there. He heads the National Assembly's Finance Committee.

Mr Kwon, a vice president of the largest opposition party, the National Congress for New Politics, had earlier admitted receiving \$180,000 from Hanbo but claimed it was a legitimate political contribution.

He also admitted later that he had received \$116,000 from Hanbo through a government MP who was arrested on Tuesday on charges of taking an equal amount of cash in bribes from the steel company.

The developments were the latest in the 18-day government investigation into the scandal, which has become a major embarrassment for President Kim and his government.

Mr Dae-jung said he has evidence that the President received illegal political funds from Hanbo for his 1992 election campaign, which eventually laid the foundation for the preferential government bank loans to the steel company. The President did not respond to the accusation.

Defection exposes weakness in Kim's leadership

Richard Lloyd Parry

The government of North Korea, already one of the most isolated and unpredictable in the world, suffered a devastating blow yesterday, when one of its most senior cadres defected to its hated enemy, South Korea.

Hwang Jang Yop, a close adviser of the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, and one of the regime's leading ideologues, fled to the South Korean embassy in Peking, and requested asylum, according to Seoul's foreign ministry. The South Korean cabinet, which is reeling from a corruption scandal, held an emergency meeting to discuss the defection and the foreign minister immediately cancelled a planned visit to an international meeting in Singapore.

Mr Hwang is the highest-ranking official ever to desert North Korea, and the defection could hardly have come at a more sensitive moment. Economically, the country is believed to be close to collapse, with continued fuel shortages bringing paralysis to factories and farms and forcing the closure of unheated schools and offices. After two consecutive years of serious floods, the country recently admitted it has only half of the rice it needs to feed its people.

Pyongyang has received millions of pounds of grain and fuel oil from the United States, Japan and South Korea, as well as international charities and United Nations organisations. The U.N.'s food aid agency said yesterday it had launched an urgent appeal to raise \$41.6 million for urgent supplies to stave off famine in North Korea.

The Rome-based World Food Programme said people were receiving a quarter of their minimum daily food needs. But for all its obvious economic distress, the Pyongyang regime has never before given any sign of being politically divided, and Mr Hwang's defection may prove to be a turning point in more ways than one. As one of the most senior members of the ruling Workers' Party, he will be able to provide unprecedented information on the internal workings of the most closed country in the world. But, alarmingly, his desertion suggests that North Korea's domestic turmoil reaches the highest political level.

Yesterday's defection is made all the more humiliating by its timing. This Sunday, the 55th birthday of the country's "Dear Leader", Kim Jong Il, is North Korea's biggest national holiday, celebrated nationwide with parades, operas and gymnastic displays. Mr Hwang was in Peking on his way back from Tokyo where he was guest of honour at a seminar held in honour of the Dear Leader. In speeches and interviews, he emphasised the stability of Kim Jong Il's regime and predicted that he would soon take on the post of president, left vacant by the death in 1994 of his father,

the country's founding leader Kim Il Sung.

As a secretary of the Workers' Party, 72-year old Mr Hwang was ranked in the top 25 of the North Korean political hierarchy. He was educated at the elite Kim Il Sung University and in Moscow, and like many leading party members is said to be a distant relative of Kim Jong Il. Mr Hwang served as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the North's parliament, the Supreme Peoples' Assembly. He was one of its most senior propagandists, the leading exponent of the country's guiding philosophy of *juche* or "self reliance", Pyongyang's curious blend of conventional Marxism and the personality cult of the Kim family.

"He's not just a big fish, he's a blue whale," said Aidan Foster-Carter of the Leeds University Korea Project yesterday. "The blow to the Pyongyang government is immeasurable," said Koichi Kato, the secretary-general of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, which has close, unofficial ties with Pyongyang. A second man, identified as Kim Duk Hung, the president of a North Korean trading company, accompanied Mr Hwang



Hwang Jang Yop: Highest official to desert North Korea

to the South Korean embassy. "Since it has been established that he is defecting of his own free will, the issue will be handled through consultations with the Chinese government," Seoul's ambassador to Peking, Chung Jong Wook, said last night. The two are not yet home and dry: China maintains a discreet but close relationship with North Korea and is obliged by treaty to repatriate North Koreans found without valid travel documents.

Pyongyang's unofficial embassy in Tokyo, the General Association of Korean Residents, denied the reports, insisting that Mr Hwang had already boarded a train bound for North Korea.

"Hwang's defection is the strongest ever signal the Stalinist regimes hierarchy is cracking," said Park Hun-OK, senior fellow at Seoul's Institute of North Korean Studies.

"With North Korea's economy in a shambles and the country totally isolated in the international community, only its *juche* ideology has been the driving force to keep it alive."

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Press law terrorises Ethiopian writers

David Orr
Addis Ababa

Like other journalists on the technologically under-resourced Ethiopian weekly, *Tobya*, Biru Tesfaye has to write his reports with pen on paper. But that is the least of his problems. Far more worrying is the threat of imprisonment. With three members of the staff in jail, the acting editor cannot but help think he might be next.

Ethiopia might enjoy more press freedom than most African countries – according to a just-published report by the New York-based human rights organisation, Freedom House, it has a “partly free press” – but it has more journalists in prison than any other country on the continent. At the time of writing, there are about 14 journalists in detention in Ethiopia; few of them have been tried.

When Arega Wolde Kirkos

was arrested early this year in connection with the publication of a reader's letter, *Tobya* decided to close down for a month in protest. Two journalists were imprisoned late last year for reprinting in the *Tobya* monthly magazine a contentious article by an Ethiopian professor living abroad (one has since been released on bail). Another was detained for an investigative piece on the hijacked Ethiopian Airlines flight which crashed last year in the Indian Ocean.

Tobya is due to reappear today. However, journalists believe their troubles are far from over.

“It's clear the government doesn't want a free press,” says the paper's lawyer, Derbew Temesgen. “We're being victimised and the situation seems to be getting worse. The government could close us down very easily. A fine of 80,000 birr (£7,600) would wipe us out immediately.”

At the forefront of press grievance is the Press Proclamation which was introduced in 1992, a year after the overthrow of the repressive Dergue regime which had ruled Ethiopia for 17 years. Though it abolished censorship, the new law has made it difficult for journalists to write about such subjects as ethnicity and national security.

Harsh sentences have been given to those journalists deemed to have violated the often arbitrary interpretation of the new press laws.

In the past three years, says a recently-published report by the Paris-based press rights group, Reporters Sans Frontières, around 150 journalists have been subject to legal proceedings in Ethiopia.

“Their crime,” says the report, “was revealing news about national security or ethnic rivalry. In Ethiopia, criticising the government, or even showing

some signs of independence, can lead to arrest or a police summons.”

With more than 70 ethnic groups living within its borders, the subject of ethnicity is a vexatious one. During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) and again during the Dergue regime, political power was largely vested in the Amhars who make up about a third of the population.

The ruling coalition of Meles Zenawi, however, is widely seen as being dominated by the northern Tigrayans.

“There is minority rule in this country and we take a strong editorial line on the subject,” says Hailu Woldetsadik, acting general manager of *Tobya*.

“The government is devoting more economic resources to Tigre than to other parts of the country. It should not be punishable to discuss issues like this.”



Going home: A Palestinian woman arriving in Ramallah after being released from an Israeli jail. Some of these women face problems returning to traditional Muslim families who consider jail a social stigma. Photograph: AP

Speaker to be new president of Ecuador

Phil Davison
Latin America Correspondent

Ecuador's Congress has appointed its Speaker, Fabian Alarcon, as the country's President, ending a week of political turmoil caused by the ousting of president Abdala Bucaram on the grounds of “mental incapacity”.

Mr Alarcon, 49, a lawyer, replaced Rosalia Arteaga, 40. She was appointed interim president on Sunday in a compromise deal brokered by the military to end street protests.

There had been reports that once she was in the job Mrs Arteaga would not give it up. But she resigned on Tuesday night shortly before Congress voted in Mr Alarcon. She did, however, criticise Mr Alarcon's appointment and called for a referendum to change the constitution so that Congress could not dump a president and name its Speaker for the job.

Mr Bucaram, meanwhile, still claimed to be the country's legal president and called Mr Alarcon “a Judas, a traitor”, for using a little-known law to get rid of him.

Mr Bucaram once relished the nickname “el loco”, the madman, but no-one seriously considered him insane. Eccentric, certainly. He is now on a tour of South American capitals to push his line that he was

illegally ousted and that the same thing could happen to other leaders in the continent.

Mr Alarcon is to call new elections next year, so that a new president can be sworn in in August 1998. He is expected to run, as is Mrs Arteaga. Mr Bucaram has said he will also run, although some Ecuadorean analysts doubt he will return from his current tour, as he may face corruption charges.

The recent turmoil began after Mr Bucaram, who ran for President as a populist last year and won easily, performed a policy about-turn and imposed a series of austerity measures. These included prices rises of up to 300 per cent on basic utilities, such as electricity and gas. He was also widely criticised for corruption, and for giving government jobs to his relatives and friends.

“The entire country is breathing easier because we have put this crisis behind us,” said the armed forces chief, General Páez Moncayo.

Gen Moncayo, a key figure in the negotiations to end the crisis, was widely applauded when he appeared in Congress for the swearing-in ceremony.

The dispute over power generated widespread fears in Ecuador that if no one took charge, the military would seize control of the country themselves.

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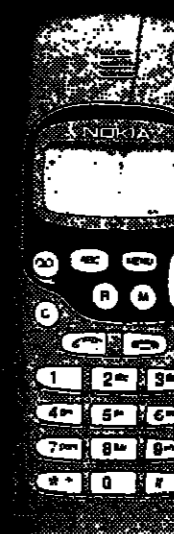
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Rifkind looks to Asia over HK rights

Richard Lloyd Parry
Singapore

The Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, arrived in Singapore yesterday for meetings with European and Asian counterparts at which he will try to consolidate pressure on China to preserve human rights in Hong Kong after Britain's handover of the colony.

"Any proposals to repeal any of the human rights ordinances that currently apply in Hong Kong would be a retrograde step," Mr Rifkind said after a meeting with Singapore's Foreign Minister, Shanmugam Jayakumar.

Concern has been expressed right across the international community, including the United States, Europe and elsewhere, and we hope the Chinese side will give very serious consideration to these concerns.

Singapore is hosting two days of talks between the foreign ministers of the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean). On Saturday, they will be joined by delegations from South Korea, Japan and China for the so called Asia Europe Meeting (Asem).

The official agenda ranges from the promotion of economic and business links to educational exchanges and the battle against the drugs trade. But the gathering is being overshadowed by worries about human rights in Burma, East Timor and potentially in Hong Kong after it reverts to Chinese rule on 1 July.

On Friday Mr Rifkind will meet the Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, in what will almost certainly be the last meeting of British and Chinese foreign ministers before 30 June.

In January, relations between Britain and China hit a new low after Peking announced it will amend Hong Kong's Bill of Rights, passed under Governor Chris Patten, restoring colonial-era laws that limit freedom of assembly and association.

The announcement infuriated Mr Patten and provoked a formal British protest. China was sufficiently taken aback by

the furor, and by the negative effect that this had on the standing in the colony of its designated head for Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, to announce it would not be necessary to reintroduce the old, repressive colonial laws after all. Instead, it said new, undefined laws would be found to guarantee Hong Kong's "stability".

Mr Rifkind will try to bring about a retraction by Peking of its most hard line statements. A senior aide said: "We don't regard these utterances as immutable and there is still something to play for."

Mr Rifkind will use the opportunity to strengthen the unofficial international coalition pressing Peking to respect human rights and independent institutions in Hong Kong.

"There is an international dimension to this. The world is watching Hong Kong," said the British official.

"We've had some East Timor, the Portuguese colony brutally annexed by Jakarta 31 years ago. The other point of friction is Burma's military government, which the EU regards as a pariah, but which is expected to become an Asean member as early as next year."

Mr Rifkind said yesterday that Burma's military government was "a rather nasty, dictatorial regime", but stopped short of calling for its international isolation.

Singapore (AP) — Police detained and handcuffed a man during the news conference by Mr Rifkind and his Singaporean counterpart, a police statement said.

A police statement said Vijay Joshi "thrust his tape recorder toward the ministers in an overly aggressive manner". He was later released.

Japan's Foreign Ministry reacted positively to the meeting. Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto said in a statement that his government hoped "the talks will pave the way for the start of full negotiations so that the incident can be solved peacefully, and the hostages freed early."

MRTA rebels stormed the Japanese embassy's home on December, demanding the release of comrades held in Peruvian jails in exchange for the lives of 500 hostages.

Fujimori, who has spent the last four days in London, told reporters that Peru was seeking a country willing to grant asylum to the hostage-takers but would not give in to the rebels' main demand or pay ransoms for the hostages' release.

But he told Japan's *Mainichi Shinbun* newspaper in an interview that he suspects some Japanese companies or families may have paid ransoms.

Commenting on the report, Japan's top spokesman, Seiroku Kajiyama, said the government had no knowledge of ransoms being paid. "From our contacts with firms and families with hostages in the residence, we understand that no ransom has been paid," he said.

In London, Mr Fujimori won John Major's support for his handling of the crisis and tried to convince investors it was an "isolated case" that would not harm Peru's economy.



Seeking allies: Mr Rifkind with his Singaporean counterpart, whom the Foreign Secretary hopes will put pressure on China Photograph: Reuters

Fujimori to handle talks on hostage crisis

James Craig
Reuters

LIMA — President Alberto Fujimori was due yesterday to take the reins in Peru's negotiations with Marxist rebels holding 72 hostages at the Japanese ambassador's home.

The government and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) rebels agreed on Tuesday to push on with further negotiations after a first face-to-face meeting to end the standoff that began on 17 December.

"We have agreed [on] the procedures to follow in future conversations and we have agreed to continue the conversations at a date yet to be set," mediators said in a statement.

Japan's Foreign Ministry reacted positively to the meeting. Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto said in a statement that his government hoped "the talks will pave the way for the start of full negotiations so that the incident can be solved peacefully, and the hostages freed early."

MRTA rebels stormed the Japanese embassy's home on December, demanding the release of comrades held in Peruvian jails in exchange for the lives of 500 hostages.

Fujimori, who has spent the last four days in London, told reporters that Peru was seeking a country willing to grant asylum to the hostage-takers but would not give in to the rebels' main demand or pay ransoms for the hostages' release.

But he told Japan's *Mainichi Shinbun* newspaper in an interview that he suspects some Japanese companies or families may have paid ransoms.

Commenting on the report, Japan's top spokesman, Seiroku Kajiyama, said the government had no knowledge of ransoms being paid. "From our contacts with firms and families with hostages in the residence, we understand that no ransom has been paid," he said.

In London, Mr Fujimori won John Major's support for his handling of the crisis and tried to convince investors it was an "isolated case" that would not harm Peru's economy.

Taiwan's rulers clamp down on old Triad allies

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

Taiwan's government is claiming that almost one in six of Triad gang members have revoked their membership just in time to avoid prosecution under draconian new anti-gang laws which are so far-reaching as to be causing concern among human rights groups.

As of midnight yesterday, prosecutors will be able to act against any grouping of more than three people who are believed to be associating for the purpose of taking part in criminal activities or participating in criminal behaviour classified as "habitual, violent and in threatening patterns".

The new law, which comes into force today, is so loose as to allow the prosecution of political party members and members of social clubs who may be suspected of having criminal intentions.

The inclusion of political party members is not without foundation because, according to the Justice Ministry, 286 out of the 858 elected representatives at local government level are involved in Triad activities.

Many legislators are also suspected of having close Triad associations, and the construction industry, property development and the entertainment industries are riddled with organised crime connections.

Public concern over the growth and strength of criminal gangs lies behind the new laws which also lower the standards for the burden of proof to secure convictions.

Newspapers and radio talk shows are filled with members of the public expressing fears that Taiwan is being submerged under the influence of Triad gangs.

"The direction of opinion is moving towards an undesirable result that exploits public discontent against gangs and their newly-acquired status in politics," said Kao Ruey-jeng, president of the Taipei Bar Association.

"Even if the government says it wants to send all gangsters to hell, the people will say yes."

The fear is that the new laws will be used against legitimate protest groups in a throwback to the old days before martial law was finally repealed in 1987. Lin Yu-fang, an opposition New Party legislator, said, "I might not be able to run for elections if they

decide to turn against me". He complained that "in the past, the government did not do enough to strike against gangsters. Now the new law is giving too much power for the government to punish ordinary people."

Under the law, a two-month grace period was granted for Triad members to turn themselves in to the police to avoid facing imprisonment of six-months to five-years plus a ten-year suspension of the right to run for public office.

Although the police are happy that so many gangsters have turned themselves in and 35 gangs, or one third of all known triad societies, have gone through disbandment procedures, the authorities are far from sure that this signals an end to criminal involvement by those involved.

The irony is that the ruling Kuomintang Party, which retreated to Taiwan in 1949, following the success of the Communist revolution on the Chinese mainland, was heavily dependent on Triad gangster support and gave shelter to the Chinese criminal elements who are now fleeing back to the mainland to avoid the crackdown in Taiwan.

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Take temptation out of the Chancellor's way



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Jobs are up, dole queues down, price rises are slowing, the economic news could hardly be better. Compared to our record over the past few decades, the economy seems to be performing extremely well, and British economic policy appears very well balanced.

Indeed, history will judge Kenneth Clarke an extremely impressive Chancellor. Just think how much better he has been than his predecessors. Norman Lamont steered us through the ERM crisis - thanks for that Norman - and a dismal recession. Nigel Lawson stoked a boom by cutting taxes and prattling on about miracles, just when inflation was taking off. Mr Clarke, in contrast, has been a huggable hero, resisting the worst political pressures to go for growth or slash taxes in the run up to the election.

In a climate of widespread admiration for Chancellor Clarke, it takes some nerve to utter a dissenting cough. But it must be done. Ahem. We do indeed admire Mr Clarke. In his battles with the Bank of England many months ago, he - and not the Governor - was right about interest rates. In his battles with his party colleagues, he was right to resist their political pressure to open the empty public purse for tax cuts, or to go for growth.

But that's not the point. Just because one Chancellor has handled things well in the past doesn't mean he is pursuing

the right policy now. Nor does it give us good reason to be confident that our Chancellors will be as virtuous in future.

The trouble is that our expectations have been lowered too far by countless economic failures and mistakes in the past. When Ken Clarke swans in and gets a few things right, we all fall over in astonishment, and assume the historical problems with Britain's policy performance must now be solved. Sadly, that is not the case.

Consider for a moment the temptations facing even the "virtuous" Chancellor Clarke right now. He may be right that no further rise in interest rates are needed. He may be correct that inflationary pressures are not growing - despite the falling unemployment, rising wages, booming house prices in the capital, and rising consumer spending that the Bank is so concerned about.

And then again, he could be wrong. He could be pushing our luck - our luck, not his, for the election will be long gone by the time we discover the answer.

As the Chancellor has always been keen to point out, judgements about economic policies don't just rely on statistics - the facts and figures only tell us what was happening several months ago. They don't tell us where the economy is going. A bit of nous, a bit of instinct, a bit of chatting with constituents and sniffing the air can go a long way. But

sniff the air now, and it smells as if the economy is flowering. People are shopping, buying houses, smiling even, despite the miserable weather.

No one believes that inflation is about to explode out of control any minute. But if the pressures are welling, and they aren't nipped quickly by a quarter point or half point rise in the cost of borrowing now, then interest rates will have to go up by a lot more later on.

But from Ken Clarke's point of view, why should he bother putting rates up now? Why not take a punt on inflation staying low?

Mr Clarke is bound to gamble a little here and there. Who can blame him? There is an election looming, after all, and he is, first and foremost, a politician. The trouble is that Chancellors will always face the temptation to delay difficult decisions under pressure from the electorate or from party colleagues.

Investors, employers, workers and voters all know this. That is why, in the end, we all expect governments to give in when things become grim, to loosen up a little, and to allow inflation to rise. As the financial markets testify, people generally expect British inflation to be

higher than it is in countries where monetary policy is taken out of the hands of politicians and handled by a central bank. As a result our interest rates are higher, and our businesses and our mortgage holders have to fork out more.

So why don't we take a deep breath and tie our politicians' hands? Why not take short-term monetary policy decisions out of the hands of politicians and give them to the bankers and economists instead? So long as politicians, accountable to voters, set the overall framework, democracy would not be violated. The job of the Chancellor would be to set the inflation target. The task of the technocrats in the Bank would be merely to monitor the economy and adjust interest rates in order to achieve it. While politicians and technocrats agree that there is no long-run trade-off between inflation and unemployment, and that there is nothing to be gained by adjusting our inflationary target month by month, then government loses nothing by handing over the control of interest rates.

Of course the Bank would need to get its act together. This year's record on economic advice has not been brilliant. The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street could do with a little shaking up if she is to cope adequately with her new responsibilities. She will of course make mistakes from time to time, just as politicians do. And she could do with

a little more time spent sniffing the air, and getting a sense of what's going on to balance her dry statistics.

But at least she wouldn't have a five-yearly incentive to get things wrong deliberately, as politicians often have. The fact that Ken Clarke has done a pretty good job of resisting the political incentives to screw up shouldn't blind us to the fact that they are powerful and damaging nevertheless.

The rot always sets in locally

How seriously should we worry about the junketing Labour councillors of Doncaster? Isn't junketing an ancient town hall tradition - a venial sin, deserving finger-pointing and red faces? We think not: a public culture which blinks at local misbehaviour becomes hardened and cynical, so that when worse corruption at national level is exposed, we hardly care. Rot begins with a small, innocent-looking spot; and spreads.

Labour is guilty this time. But there are lessons for the Tories. First, these things happen in one-party regimes. Second, council junketing is the sort of thing second-raters get up to. Why don't we have more first-rate people in local government? Because the Government has steadily stripped it of power.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Marconi sale dismays world scholars

Sir: Christie's statement that its sale of the GEC-Marconi archive on 24 and 25 April has been arranged as part of the company's centenary "celebrations" makes dismal reading.

Guglielmo Marconi's daughter, Princess Elettra Marconi Giovannelli, is understandably appalled, and scholars across the world await with dismay what they see as the almost inevitable dispersal of a collection of unparalleled importance for the early history of radio communications.

By the very nature of Marconi's innovation, the 5,000 documents and 300 artefacts whose sale is planned are part of an international heritage. But the case for their remaining in England, where Marconi chose to perform his most creative work and where his close collaborator, J.A. Fleming, developed his thermionic valve, is overwhelming. A way must be found.

Time is short. But GEC-Marconi's public relations director has surely misapprehended what he describes as "the public interest". That interest does not reside in a public auction and the sale of a promised CD-Rom on the life and work of Marconi designed for schools and libraries. It resides squarely in a review of the company's decision and a determined effort by everyone concerned to secure the deposit of the papers and objects in conditions that will ensure their permanent availability to historians and the general public.

ROBERT FOX
Professor of the History of Science
Oxford

Sir: The disposal of the early archives of the Marconi company ("Marconi auction signals end of historic museum collection", 10 February) would be an act of vandalism.

The value of any archive of papers accumulated in the course of business depends on keeping it together: as a whole it can tell us vastly more than its parts individually, and in this case the proposal to sell it in a thousand lots means that much would vanish entirely from sight.

Happily it is not too late to work out a more enlightened strategy that would keep together not only the papers but also the associated objects - the whole is a collection of immense historical and scientific importance.

It seems that little has been done to explore possible means of keeping it together in this country. However, its export to a caring institution abroad would be infinitely preferable to its dispersal.

Professor P.D.A. HARVEY
Chairman, British Records Association
Durham

New homes must be sustainable

Sir: Peter Popham's article on planning for the nation's projected 4.4 million new households is timely, but sadly misrepresents the issue as a classic "environment versus development" debate (analysis, 11 February).

The "environmentalists" opponents of conventional development projects are not



standing against social progress. Their prime motivation is the concept of sustainable development, which aims to meet human needs worldwide and for future generations while keeping within the ecological capacity of the planet. Protest against unsustainable development is essentially about protecting mankind.

Moreover, development to meet community needs is very much on the agenda of environmental activists, as seen at last year's Pure Genius land occupation in Wansworth, and in rural low-impact settlements such as Kingshill and Tinker's Bubble in Somerset. The real environmental authoritarianism lies with the Government, which has repeatedly used the planning system to block such attempts at people-based sustainability and enforced its own profit-based rationale for development.

The key challenge for the planning system is not so much the UK's household projections as the need fully to assimilate the green agenda. Too much of the current system perpetuates high-impact development, and merely determines the location of otherwise unsustainable land uses.

If this continues, we may look back more sympathetically on the "tree people", as rising seas lap the homes and gardens of Professor Hall's next generation of Milton Keynes.

Sir: Peter Popham ("Milton Keynes Multiplied", 11 February) quotes Peter Hall's concept of more new towns like Milton Keynes, linked by existing or proposed railway lines.

On the face of it this looks like sound and sustainable stuff. The trouble is that Milton Keynes is so spread out that almost every activity involves a journey, usually by car: hardly sustainable in the generally accepted meaning of conserving resources.

Our priority in seeking to accommodate lots of new - if smaller - households is to look first at our existing towns and cities, which have been catastrophically denuded of people. Compact communities, where the necessities and pleasures of life are close at hand, are not only more sustainable than those that are spread out - the best of them are, for many people, much the best places to live.

Let's upgrade all parts of all our towns and cities for all their citizens before we start squandering resources on another round of car-orientated dispersal.

HARLEY SHERLOCK
London EC1

Better late than never?

Sir: I can cap Dr Richard Mayne's amusing piece of computerised letter-writing (letter, 10 February) with a more macabre example. A year after my wife, M.C. James, died, a letter arrived from an insurance company addressed to "M.C. James Deceased Esq", and it began: "Dear Mr Deceased."

ROGER JAMES
Southsea, Hampshire

Ban on screening unfair to men

Sir: It has become a cliché in articles about prostate specific antigen (PSA) screening to quote the undisputed fact that many men who harbour malignant cells in their prostate die of something else before the prostate cancer kills them ("Prostate screening ruled out by NHS", 7 February).

Some doctors go on to argue that PSA screening is uneconomic or positively harmful, because it identifies men who may not be destined to die of the disease and spreads anxiety (and presumably would cost the NHS money).

The only way that this cancer can be cured is if it is diagnosed at an early stage while it is still confined to the prostate. While this may be discovered by accident, the only deliberate way of testing for the possibility of the disease is by PSA.

Because many men do not die of the disease, the NHS concludes that early diagnosis should be denied. The consequence is that the 8,500 men who will die from prostate cancer every year in this country should not be cured - ie the NHS is refusing to cure many people bound to die painfully because a larger number with the same disease will die of something else. This is terrible logic, cannot be good medicine and is surely immoral.

The US Federal Government some years ago commissioned an exhaustive study of PSA testing

from a public health point of view which took a very hard look at the economics of national PSA screening.

The study, which is publicly available, basically concluded that so long as the treatment was nationally as effective as it was at the better medical centres, PSA testing was economic and could be supported by Medicare.

JEROME GOLDSTEIN
London W1

Pupils too must carry the can

Sir: You say that John Major intends to sack teachers whose pupils fail to match up to national standards ("Bad results to cost jobs of teachers", 12 February). Doesn't the Conservative Party believe in personal responsibility any more?

Twenty years ago a pupil of mine gatecrashed St John's College May Ball trying to steal a bicycle. His tutor rescued him from the cells, pleading that he was due to sit an examination that morning. The pupil fell asleep, and failed his O-level.

If behaviour like this is to result in the sacking of a teacher rather than the punishment of the pupil, won't it encourage all students to do the same?

Rev TOM AMBROSE
Director of Communications
Diocese of Ely
Ely, Cambridgeshire

Weighty issue of the female brain

Sir: Your reply to the question (Technoquest, 10 February) concerning the differences between the male and female brain was illuminating. "Female brains are on average 10 per cent smaller than male brains." So far, so good. No one has yet produced a reliable correlation between human brain size and intelligence, so no need for us all to panic at this revelation. So why did you?

Why put in the totally irrelevant comment that "women's bodies are, on average, more than 10 per cent lighter than men's, so their brain weight is a higher percentage of the whole body." So what? Do you suggest that fat people are intellectually inferior to thin people? Or Americans to Chinese?

Dr EAGER
Exmouth, Devon

African kwaggas

Sir: An article about "zebras" ("What happens when a donkey meets a zebra", 6 February) stated that the two zebras in Britain, Zed and Zee, were believed to be the only ones in the world outside the United States.

A species in South Africa, known as "kwaggas", has been in existence for a number of years. Kwaggas had been extinct since the last century, but scientists experimenting with donkey-zebra combinations managed to reproduce them.

The animals can be seen in a game reserve at Stellenbosch near Cape Town.
LAURA ATTWOOD
London NW70

Minimum wage helps small firms

Sir: Your leading article of 11 February suggested that some jobs in small businesses would be lost as a result of a national minimum wage. It should also be pointed out that a minimum wage would protect many small businesses from the predatory pricing policies of larger competitors.

I met a couple who run a fish and chip shop. Their employees are mostly members of their own family and they earn decent wages. A few months ago a fast food chain set up an outlet opposite their shop. The workers there are paid only £2 per hour. Because their labour costs are lower, the fast food chain can undercut the fish and chip shop.

The cruellest irony is that this family is paying taxes to subsidise through the benefit system the low wages paid by the fast food chain. If a Labour government ends this scam it will do us all a favour.

Dr MARK PATTON
Lewes, East Sussex

Sir: Your leading article about New Labour's appeal to the small business community (11 February) has failed to understand what is happening.

Jack Woolley, long a stalwart of the Bournemouth Tory Party, is too old to change to New Labour now. On the other hand, more youthful businessmen such as Simon Pemberton may see things differently. That, indeed, is why Pemberton took on the role of Bournemouth organiser for New Labour last year.

It was this act which led the Grunds, formerly stewards of the Bournemouth constituency GMC, to depart for Arthur Scargill's SLP and, in turn, caused Pemberton's efforts to evict them from Grange Farm.

Much of this has, of course, remained hidden from listeners to *The Archers*, but it is the stuff of street conversation in north London where many of those who live in Ambridge have second homes.

KEITH FLEET
London N17

Press button 1 for salvation

Sir: Faced with overcapacity, disappearing customers and no possibility of diversifying, the Church of England might have to take a lead from other big businesses caught in the same trap - close branches, downsize to a core, sell peripherals and real estate ("Rumors and the long melancholy roar", 10 February).

This would finance redundancies in the field and a new small organisation at Lambeth with a catchy title, staffed by a few bishops. Some would handle advertising of the Christian message by all usual means, including telephone and maildrop. The rest would run a Freephone helpline.

Suppliants might be answered: "Hello, thank you for calling ABC. If you seek salvation, press 1. To discuss remission of your sins, press 2. For Bible queries, press 3. We cannot help with dreams of avarice but if you press the Star key and then 060 you will be connected to Mammon, a division of your local water company."

In all seriousness, if the above process works for the business world, why not for religion?

GRAHAM HOLDEN
Buddleigh Salterton, Devon

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Fisk in Ireland: Part 2

Heaven, hell and Irish politics

In the second of his reports on Northern Ireland, *The Independent's* award-winning war reporter Robert Fisk finds no love lost and no sign of a way ahead between Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley

There was a gin and tonic on the bar table and the former Northern Ireland Office official, features as gnarled as his cynicism, a Protestant as brutally honest about his own people as he is about Catholics, was waiting for me in his usual Belfast haunt. A quarter century ago, he would curse my pessimism. Now he was worse than me; and I was shocked. "Bob, I've never seen such sectarian hatred. You know, I was talking to a senior policeman the other day about Drumcree. He had been working for Chief Constable Annesley - whom we called 'the eternal flame' because he never went out - and I told this policeman that it all ended last summer at Drumcree when the RUC let the Protestants march through the Catholic streets. I said to him there was no way forward since the loyalists set aside the

rule of law at Drumcree. It proved for everyone that the Protestants, when they take to the streets, have more power than the law." Drumcree has become a milepost of Northern Ireland history, like Bloody Sunday in Derry or the Protestant Ulster Workers' Council strike that brought down the power-sharing Belfast government in 1974. In 1972, Bloody Sunday destroyed finally and forever the British Army's credibility among Catholics. The Protestant strike destroyed the British government's credibility among Catholics. And Drumcree, in the early summer of last year, destroyed the last shreds of Catholic hope that the RUC could be trusted. Sometimes I suspect that Ulstermen take pride in these epic disasters. I must have been told a hundred times - with pride, of course - that it was the men of east Belfast who built the *Titanic*.

And like that state-of-the-art White Star liner, my old friend with the gin and tonic could see his province sinking ever deeper into its grave. There was a terrible irony in all this. This same man - a trusted confidant of British officials - would abuse me for suggesting that Protestants could not live alongside Catholics, for ignoring Protestants suffering at the hands of the IRA. Yet just a few hours earlier, I had been walking up the Falls Road in the rain, listening to the political representative of that very same IRA as he insisted that peace could be obtained, that the British could bring it about - if only

they would face up to Unionism. It was a droll conversation I had with Gerry Adams at the corner of Finaghy Road North as his bodyguard, pale green shades wrapped around his face, scanned each passing car with the moonbeam eyes of a man looking for a gun barrel. Watching Adams, I kept thinking about war. And he kept talking about peace.

"We took the British by surprise when we declared our ceasefire. They had a problem. They were saying that the war was being contained. And all of a sudden we were suing for peace - and it was out of their control. And so they wanted to slow it down, to forget the consensus that our peace was creating. And that's why, after we had a ceasefire, there was an attempt to create new conditions. I knew we would reach that fatal phrase, the 'decommissioning of weapons'. I remember when I learnt of it over the BBC in Beirut - where the civil war militias were allowed to bury their guns on the promise that the future peace would make them irrelevant, turn them into museum pieces, like the civil war swords on the walls of English pubs.

"When I first heard of 'decommissioning', I asked Martin McGuinness what it meant," Adams said. (McGuinness was a gentleman who had a different role when I last met him 25 years ago in Derry, one rather closely associated with Armalite rifles.) "Well, McGuinness went through the dictionaries and couldn't find the word. Then at last he said it means 'taking out of commission'. And still I don't know what that means. It's an issue - I talked to Mayhew about it. But he never had any expectation that that for a peace to work, it has to 'click'. It hasn't yet 'clicked' with the British."

Now I could think of quite a lot of clicking - of a rather different kind - that had come from the IRA over the past quarter century. And I wasn't very impressed with the political *mes culpas* that came from Gerry Adams. "One of the things we've failed to do," he said brightly, "is engage with British public opinion." But you did, I said, at Canary Wharf last year. And Adams's head turned suddenly towards me. He didn't like the "you". And he wanted to see if I was joking. I wasn't. "I'm talking about political engagement," he said and on we walked, a little faster than before, as if the rain were getting heavier. It wasn't.

How easy it is for those Americans who have supported the military "efficiency" of the IRA to forget, as John Hume has acidly observed, that while 87 per cent of civilian fatalities in the past 25 years have been killed by nationalist or "loyalist" paramilitaries, more than one in two of all dead IRA men were killed by their own hand. What kind of an outfit is this that the British are so afraid of, I kept asking myself?

But then again, we sometimes ask why the militarily powerful Israelis are so apprehensive of a few thousand Hizbollah men in southern Lebanon. Is this because Israel needs an excuse to stay in southern Lebanon? Does Britain need an excuse to delay the peace process?

There are more parallels. We journalists experience a little hesitation in pointing out the flaws in a "peace process". Suggest that the Middle East



peace is unjust to the Arab nations, and we are condemned for being "against peace" - and thus sympathetic to "terrorism". Suggest that the IRA, for all its viciousness, may have a point about arms "decommissioning", and the same lies are told about us. Peace, it seems, can be a very dangerous commodity.

The parallels go even further. Just as Israel dictates American policy in the Middle East, so the Unionists believe - not without reason - that they can dictate British policy in Northern Ireland. In both cases, this makes the relationship between protector and protégé unhealthy, even explosive, for their enemies. Which is why Adams wants the British to "face up" to Unionism and for Unionists to bargain with nationalists for an "accommodation". He would sit down with Paisley. "They [Unionists] have real difficulty in ceasing to be top dogs - nationalists have had enough of that."

Is Dr Ian Paisley a "top dog"? He likes to be tame and wag his tail in a chummy way, watching you all the time to see if you spot the moment when he bares his teeth before clamping them firmly into your shin. Paisley saw no obvious parallels with the Middle East but surprised me with one of his first comments. "I've visited the Holy Land many times and I don't doubt that the promised land was for the Jews," he said. "But the Palestinians are a large body of people - and it was their land as well. I can well see their situation. Somehow, I did not think he saw the Catholics' situation in quite the same way."

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But at one point, Dr Paisley said something that could have been uttered by that most famous of all nationalist politicians, John Hume. Hume had told me 24 hours earlier that "in many ways what we need is a Unionist de Klerk - there are parallels between the South African situation and our own." And now Dr Paisley said to me: "I would settle for what happened in South Africa - they got it by the maintenance of the Union of South Africa, and by majority vote." But fear not, reader, the teeth were still intact in the old dog.

"I will never sit down with Gerry Adams." But he's just told me he'd sit down with you, I said to Paisley. "He'd sit with anyone. He'd sit down with the devil. In fact, Adams does sit down with the devil." And if there is a devil, there must, of course, be a God. "I believe," said Paisley, his voice rising, "that I will see God, as the scriptures make it clear, because I'm a sinner saved by grace. Every man stands on the common ground of sinnership. Yes, I believe heaven is a definite place, that God is a real person as revealed in the mystery of the Trinity." This was heavy stuff. Our little Portakabin

was turning into a Presbyterian chapel and I didn't know how to halt the transformation. Yes, Paisley said, Protestantism was growing in the Republic. Why a well-known IRA man south of the border had converted to Protestantism and was now among his church wardens.

This was too much. I tried to change the subject. Muslims believe in a rather colourful, physically attractive heaven, I said. Why didn't Protestantism describe heaven? And the teeth flashed, quite literally, at me. "Ah Robert, you do not know your scriptures," he boomed. And as Paisley delved into his pocket and produced a small red notebook with gold-edged pages, I felt the teeth closing. "Revelations, Chapter 22, verse one, 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ... and I saw an angel standing in the sun.' " Paisley's voice was so loud in the tiny room that my ears began to hurt. "Revelations Chapter 21, verses one and two, 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... And I ... saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' "

And I was thinking about Jerusalem when the voice suddenly stopped and lowered to prayerful decibel. "Ah Robert," he said, "you are an ignorant man."

Tomorrow: Robert Fisk in Derry finds that the border is a state of mind

6 For peace to work it has to click. It hasn't with the British
- Adams

6 I will never sit down with Adams. He'd sit with the devil
- Paisley

Personal Equity Plans

Saturday 15th February 1997

The Independent's "Long Weekend" section will be publishing a comprehensive survey on Personal Equity Plans.

The survey will identify what they are and who should consider them.

It will also define the different types of PEPs available and include a table of the leading providers.

THE INDEPENDENT

Whisky and the spirit of the purist

Yesterday I said that the Scotch Whisky Association was being a bit unfair. They were taking a Manx whisky firm called Glen Kella to court for putting the name "whiskey" on their product. The SWA's objection is that Glen Kella distills the "whiskey" before bottling it, and the SWA says that you shouldn't do things to whisky after it leaves the cask. So I said that this was unfair because the Scotch whisky industry itself tampers with whisky before bottling it.

This brought me a quiet phone call yesterday from the wise men of the legal department at *The Independent*, hinting that I should not say such things unless I had some evidence to back it up. Oh, but I had, I said. (Not often I can say this.) Why, only the other day in the *Financial Times*, Roderick Oram was writing as follows:

"For decades Scotch producers have put their spirit through further processes after the cask. First, they dilute the spirit from cask strength of about 60 per cent alcohol by

volume to 40 per cent with demineralised water. Then sometimes a little caramel is added to darken the colour. Lastly, before bottling, the spirit is cooled to about 0°C and filtered to remove fatty acids. These are taken out to prevent the 'chill haze' that can occur when whisky gets very cold."

(Whisky, I think, would be a clear liquid if left to its own devices. The colouring comes from the casks in which they chose to store it. I once met a man high up in the organisation that makes Cutty Sark whisky, who bemoaned to me the fact that Cutty Sark was a clearish whisky. "I'm sure we'd sell twice as much if it was darker, as people suppose whisky should be, but it wouldn't be any better a whisky if we darkened it," he sighed.)

The situation seems clear. If you want to after the whisky after it leaves the cask, you must never do what Glen Kella is doing to it. You must only do all the things that the SWA permits people to do it. And yet, reports Mr Oram, not all experts are happy with the situation. "Scotch purists like their

spirit cask strength and unfiltered. I do love getting some of the stuff straight from the cask," says a senior Speyside distiller. "The chill filter is a compromise. It keeps the Scotch clear but it takes out some of the mouth-feel, the wonderful rounded feeling of the whisky."

Now I have met some of these Scotch purists and they certainly know what they are talking about. You could meet them too if you went to Edinburgh and wandered down the Royal Mile until you came to a shop called The Whisky Shop. The first time I came to it I went in and asked for a bottle of Laphroaig, that strange smoky, peaty malt whisky from the islands.



Miles Kingston

"Do you want our Laphroaig?" asked the man. I didn't know what he meant. So he explained to me then the very same thing that Roderick Oram was saying in the *Financial Times* - that when a distillery markets its own malt whisky, it isn't giving you the stuff straight from the cask. It's doing a bit of filtering and a bit of colouring and a bit of this and that. But The Whisky Shop is run by a firm of bottlers called Cadenhead's who for nearly 200 years have been in the business of buying casks straight from distilleries and bottling what is in the cask without changing it.

So you can see, sir, that our Glen Whatever malt whisky is more authentic than the whisky that comes from the Glen Whatever distillery. We don't make changes to it. They do."

been there, or to their shop in Covent Garden, I have never heard Cadenhead's make the risky claim that their straight-from-the-cask stuff is better than the stuff that Glen Whatever fiddles around with.

"You may well prefer the cooled, filtered, dyed whisky," they say. "That's up to you. All we say is that we bottle straight from the cask, and they don't."

I don't suppose for a moment that Cadenhead's would feel like emulating Glen Kella's process of redistilling. But I think they would feel a smidgen of sympathy for any firm which is descended on by the weight of the big whisky boys, as they have been in the past. Oh yes, Glen Whatever has, in the past, tried - and failed - to get the law to stop Cadenhead's from bottling and selling Glen Whatever under that name, even though it was more authentic than the stuff put out by Glen Whatever.

I'm not sure I want to start drinking Glen Kella whisky. But I can't help hoping that David comes out ahead of Goliath on this one.

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 **THE BLUE CROSS**

business & city

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Bank tells Clarke to act now

Yvette Cooper and
Diane Coyle

The Bank of England warned again yesterday that interest rates should rise, as official figures revealed a further big drop in the number of people claiming unemployment benefit and a faster pace of average earnings growth. The warning came hours after Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer, insisted that no increase in rates was necessary.

"There should be a rise in interest rates now. The longer you delay, the more interest rates will have to go up," said Mervyn King, the Bank's chief economist, commenting on the latest quarterly Inflation Report.

He said that although the claimant count was exaggerating the fall in unemployment, there had been a clear tightening in the labour market. Tax cuts and up to £22.4bn in "windfalls" of building society shares

for higher borrowing costs. Mr Clarke was not the only person to reject this as unnecessary.

"Sterling's rise will hit exports, slowing the pace of growth and lowering the risks of capacity constraints," Michael Saunders at investment bank Salomon Brothers said. But other City economists backed the Bank. "The price of liquidity now is likely to be higher base rates in the longer run - a price unlikely to be paid by the current Chancellor of the Exchequer," said Adam Cole at James Capel.

The Bank's warning that the labour market was getting tighter, contributing to inflationary pressures, was borne out by new Government statistics.

Unemployment fell by a much bigger than expected 67,800 in January, according to the Government's figures, leaving 1,385,300 men and 430,000 women still on the dole. The claimant count has now fallen by a record average of 70,000 a month over the past three months pushing the unemployment rate down to 6.5 per cent - 1 percentage point above the lowest level in April 1990.

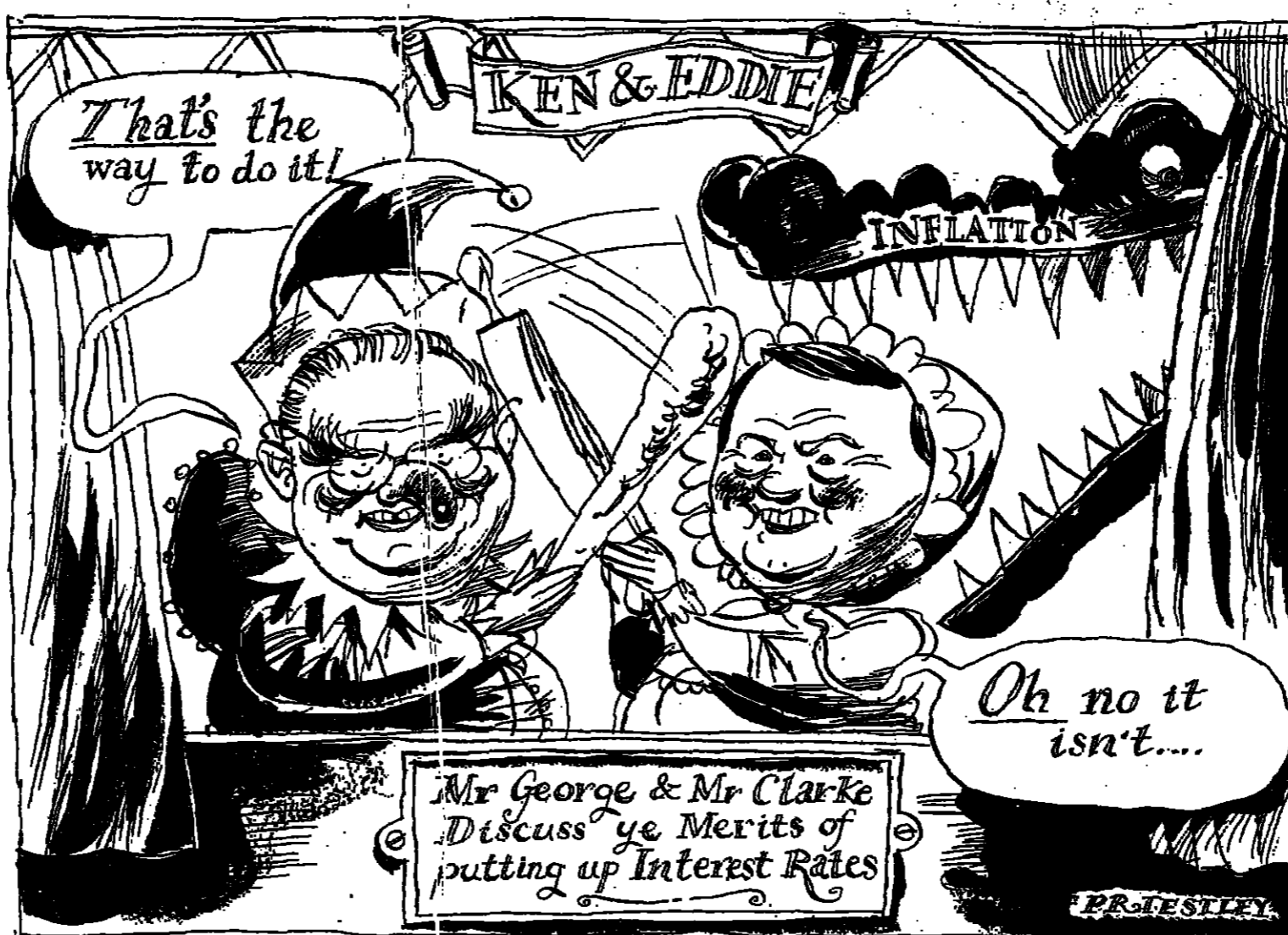
Eric Fowth, employment minister, said the 6 per cent barrier was in sight. However, officials admitted the recent introduction of the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) means the figures cannot be relied upon as an estimate of the number of people leaving unemployment for new jobs.

According to Simon Briscoe, an economist at Nikko, the changes "have made the interpretation of the monthly unemployment figures impossible". The more reliable Labour Force Survey shows unemployment falling at a much slower rate.

But other indicators suggest the labour market is tightening, as the Bank claims. Average earnings grew by 4.25 per cent in 1996, compared with 3.25 per cent in 1995. Pay settlements have already increased, so the rise reflects higher bonuses and overtime payments. The Inflation Report says, "earnings growth is already close to the maximum likely to be consistent with the current inflation target".

David Walton of Goldman Sachs said: "Even allowing for the JSA, these numbers suggest that the labour market is tightening much too rapidly for comfort. This carries a real danger of higher wage inflation during 1997 with consequent risks for retail price inflation in 1998."

However, the Government will find some comfort in the fact that productivity is rising and the growth in unit labour costs for companies has slowed.



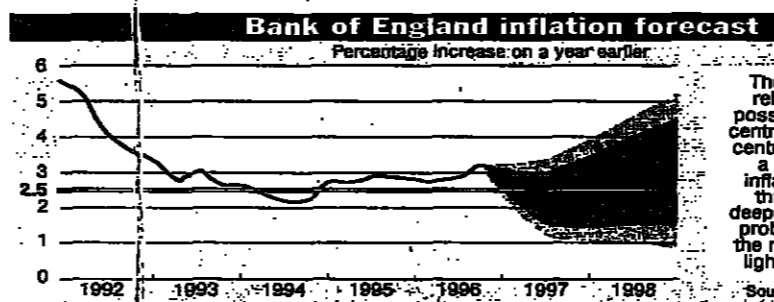
Sterling takes a breather in rates debate

It should have been no surprise that there was a pause in the recent steep climb in the pound on a day when the economic debate hinged almost entirely on the strength of the exchange rate. Its index against other currencies closed at the same level, 98.2, as the previous day, writes Diane Coyle.

Even so, sterling has increased by 16 per cent in value since last August, and remains at about the level from which it tumbled out of the exchange rate mechanism on 16 September 1992. The exchange rate is the fault-line currently dividing the interest rate hawks from the doves.

There is no question that a strong pound will tend to reduce inflation and erode the UK's trade position. What is hotly disputed, in the corridors of power and City alike, is whether it is therefore a good enough substitute for higher interest rates.

That is certainly Kenneth Clarke's view. He has emphasised the impact the exchange rate will have on exports and



Bank reckons a mix of reasons lies behind the pound's current strength: the expectation that UK interest rates will rise relative to US and European rates, the impact of government budget cuts on the Continent in reducing market interest rates across the Channel, and the increase in oil prices.

The Bank's forecast incorporates both the one-off effect of a higher exchange rate on the price level via lower import prices, reducing measured inflation rates for 12 months, and the longer-lasting impact via reduced exports and higher imports. But it assumes, based on financial market expectations, that sterling's index will fall to about 91 within two years. Mr King said: "There is nothing remotely odd or controversial about this view."

Roger Bootle, chief economist at HSBC Markets and one of the Treasury's "wise persons" disagreed. "These supposedly one-off shocks have a way of carrying on. The pound will be a powerful disinflationary force," he said.

manufacturing as a counterweight to robust consumer demand. The business community agrees, with a succession of companies this year having complained about weaker export prospects.

Ian Peters, deputy director general of the British Chambers of Commerce, said yesterday that a rise in base rates would "fuel the fire" under the pound.

Mervyn King, the Bank of England's chief economist, said the Bank's new

inflation forecast took account of sterling's strength. This was why he had revised down the forecast for the next few months. He added that the exchange rate appreciation posed a dilemma: domestic demand would expand too fast if the Chancellor did not raise rates, or export demand would suffer if he did.

A lengthy section of yesterday's Inflation Report sets out the textbook analysis of a strong exchange rate. The

Water companies face swingeing price cuts

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The privatised water companies will face the kind of big one-off cut in bills seen in the gas and electricity industries under proposals outlined yesterday by Ian Byatt, the water regulator.

The plans, which will form part of a new price-cap regime from 2000, will also pile further pressure on water shareholders by pledging that bills will not increase in real terms in the years that follow the initial price reduction.

Mr Byatt said the next set of price controls would have to make up for efficiency gains made by companies in the current price regime, which began in 1995 and was due to last until 2005. He has since decided to introduce a new formula from 2000 after several of the 10 big water and sewerage groups failed to meet their investment targets. In 1995-96 their capital spending fell short

of the £2.6bn target in the price formula by £300m.

Mr Byatt said the water companies had "reported significant savings since the last review of price limits". He continued: "I propose to transfer the future benefits of these savings to customers at the next review through an initial downward adjustment of real prices."

Though Mr Byatt's department, Ofwat, has not fixed a figure for price cuts, it is taking a lead from the electricity and gas industries where recent price packages have provoked furious responses from the companies involved. British Gas has taken its campaign against a 20 per cent one-off cut planned by the watchdog, Ofwat, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Ofwat also made clear that water groups could not expect to see above-inflation increases in bills in later years, reversing the previous pricing policy which allowed the cost of the

huge investment backlog in the industry to be passed directly through to customers.

He said: "I will expect companies to demonstrate improving standards for customers and efficiency gains will allow price to come down in real terms, despite continuing capital investment requirements."

David Luffman, finance director of Thames Water, admitted the new formula would be "tough" to comply with. Thames was the only water company which recently refused Mr Byatt's request to soften price increases next year because its investment had not matched Ofwat targets.

"This is a nice objective but the reality has to be that it depends on the scale of the service improvements demanded. You can't have an open consultation process and prejudice the matter," Mr Luffman said.

He said the final price cap must depend on whether the European Commission tight-



Turning off the taps: Ian Byatt is determined to cut bills

ened controls on drinking water standards, requiring companies to make further investments. "If Europe conjures another shopping list of improvements then the process has to be flexible."

In another innovation, Mr Byatt is to appoint an advisory board of senior industrialists, mirroring a similar move by Don Cruickshank, the telephone regulator.

BA claims tie-up will benefit rivals by £613m

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Bob Ayling, chief executive of British Airways, yesterday stepped up his defence of the group's planned alliance with American Airlines, claiming rival carriers would see benefits in revenue worth £1bn (£613m) as a result.

At a speech to mark the tenth anniversary of BA's flotation, Mr Ayling claimed services between Heathrow and the USA would grow by a fifth if the alliance partners had to give up some of their lucrative runway slots at the airport under proposals from the Office of Fair Trading. The OFT says the tie-up could escape a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission if the partners had to divest 168 slots, equivalent to twelve daily round-trip flights.

Mr Ayling said the new services would come when the UK and US concluded an "open skies" agreement to liberalise ac-

cess to Heathrow Airport. Rounding on critics of the strategy, which has linked approval for the alliance to the successful outcome of the talks, he said: "It may not please our competitors, nor the purists among the competition authorities, but in the real world it offers the only chance of real progress."

The alliance involves BA and American going beyond simple "code-sharing" arrangements to a deal where the two airlines pool revenues and facilities. Rival carriers in the US have launched an unprecedented attack on the link-up, which would give BA and American 60 per cent of UK-US flight capacity.

Mr Ayling's remarks were seen by other airlines last night as an attempt to back up his insistence that British Airways should only give up Heathrow slots if it gets financial compensation. Experts have estimated that the proposed 168 slots, which amount to almost all the slots currently allocated

to American Airlines, could net BA £180m.

The debate over slot trading has become crucial to the successful conclusion of the alliance after European Commissioners said the practice of selling the slots was illegal under Commission rules.

But rival carriers doubted BA's claim that services would grow by 20 per cent from the slot divestiture plans. A spokesman for United Airlines said: "We frankly doubt whether BA and American are doing this in order to cut their own share of the market. From their point of view that doesn't make sense."

Other US airlines have pointed out that BA and American would still be left with more than 3,000 slots at Heathrow. They have also claimed that other facilities, including security checks, baggage handling and departure gates, are in such short supply that the open skies deal would in practice lead to little growth in flight capacity.

STOCK MARKETS				
FTSE 100	Dow Jones	Nikkei		
4340	7070	17600		
4320	6990	18200		
4290	6910	18400		
4260	6830	18600		
4230	6750	18800		
4200	6670	19000		
4170	6590	19200		
4140	6510	19400		
4110	6430	19600		
4080	6350	19800		
4050	6270	20000		
4020	6190	20200		
3990	6110	20400		
3960	6030	20600		
3930	5950	20800		
3900	5870	21000		
3870	5790	21200		
3840	5710	21400		
3810	5630	21600		
3780	5550	21800		
3750	5470	22000		
3720	5390	22200		
3690	5310	22400		
3660	5230	22600		
3630	5150	22800		
3600	5070	23000		
3570	4990	23200		
3540	4910	23400		
3510	4830	23600		
3480	4750	23800		
3450	4670	24000		
3420	4590	24200		
3390	4510	24400		
3360	4430	24600		
3330	4350	24800		
3300	4270	25000		
3270	4190	25200		
3240	4110	25400		
3210	4030	25600		
3180	3950	25800		
3150	3870	26000		
3120	3790	26200		
3090	3710	26400		
3060	3630	26600		
3030	3550	26800		
3000	3470	27000		
2970	3390	27200		
2940	3310	27400		
2910	3230	27600		
2880	3150	27800		
2850	3070	28000		
2820	2990	28200		
2790	2910	28400		
2760	2830	28600		
2730	2750	28800		
2700	2670	29000		
2670	2590	29200		
2640	2510	29400		
2610	2430	29600		
2580	2350	29800		
2550	2270	30000		
2520	2190	30200		
2490	2110	30400		
2460	2030	30600		
2430	1950	30800		
2400	1870	31000		
2370	1790	31200		
2340	1710	31400		
2310	1630	31600		
2280	1550	31800		
2250	1470	32000		
2220	1390	32200		
2190	1310	32400		
2160	1230	32600		
2130	1150	32800		
2100	1070	33000		
2070	990	33200		
2040	910	33400		
2010	830	33600		
1980	750	33800		
1950	670	34000		
1920	590	34200		
1890	510	34400		
1860	430	34600		
1830	350	34800		
1800	270	35000		
1770	190	35200		
1740	110	35400		
1710	30	35600		
1680		35800		
1650		36000		
1620		36200		
1590		36400		
1560		36600		
1530		36800		
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990		40400		
960		40600		
930		40800		
900		41000		
870		41200		
840		41400		
810		41600		
780		41800		
750		42000		
720		42200		
690		42400		
660		42600		
630		42800		
600		43000		
570		43200		
540		43400		
510		43600		
480		43800		
450		44000		
420		44200		
390		44400		
360		44600		
330		44800		
300		45000		
270		45200		
240		45400		
210		45600		
180		45800		
150		46000		
120		46200		
90		46400		
60		46600		
30		46800		
0		47000		

INTEREST RATES				
Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond		
6.44	7.12	7.81		
6.18	6.86	7.55		
5.92	6.60	7.29		
5.66	6.34	7.03		
5.40	6.08	6.77		
5.14	5.82	6.51		
4.88	5.56	6.25		
4.62	5.30	5.99		
4.36	5.04	5.73		
4.10	4.78	5.47		
3.84	4.52	5.21		
3.58	4.26	4.95		
3.32	4.00	4.69		
3.06	3.74	4.43		
2.80	3.48	4.17		
2.54	3.22	3.91		
2.28	2.96	3.65		
2.02	2.70	3.39		
1.76	2.44	3.13		
1.50	2.18	2.87		
1.24	1.92	2.61		
0.98	1.66	2.35		
0.72	1.40	2.09		
0.46	1.14	1.83		
0.20	0.88	1.57		
	0.62	1.31		
	0.36	1.05		
	0.10	0.79		
		0.53		
		0.27		
		0.01		

CURRENCIES				
\$/£	\$/DM	\$/¥		
1.64	2.25	1.47		



COMMENT

Mr Clarke thinks he can sit back and enjoy the election campaign because the strong pound will stop inflation in its tracks

We need higher taxes, not higher interest rates

The row between the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer has reached alarmingly dramatic proportions. But even so, the Bank has diplomatically refrained from pointing out that it would not be calling for higher interest rates in this public fashion if Mr Clarke had tamed the economy with a tougher Budget.

The problem is that the Chancellor is trying to use one weapon - interest rates - to target two enemies. One is inflation, the other the over-strong exchange rate. One requires higher borrowing costs to keep it on target in the medium term and sustain steady growth. The other requires lower borrowing costs to protect exports and balance the recovery between domestic and external demand.

Mr Clarke's claim is that these two enemies actually neutralise each other so he doesn't need to worry. He can sit back and enjoy the election campaign because the strong pound will stop inflation in its tracks.

To be fair, a respectable number of economists agree with this, including Martin Weale of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, a source of the Government's budgetary forecasts. The Chancellor's supporters on interest rates reckon the pound will have a big enough effect on exports and imports to dampen growth to a pace consistent with meeting the inflation target.

There are plenty of economists, however, who share the Bank's view that relying on the exchange rate is no substitute for actively bringing the economy under control. In their

view domestic demand growth is buoyant enough to outweigh the strong pound's effect on trade. Indeed, the rise in sterling, by cutting import prices, will help boost consumer purchasing power and spending. An exchange rate appreciation does not always lead to an economic downturn. It depends what else is happening in the economy.

As the Bank's Mervyn King puts it, there is no simple rule relating exchange rates to interest rates. Unlike the base rate, the pound is not an economic policy lever.

All this would be a matter entirely for academic debate if Mr Clarke had used fiscal policy to limit likely consumer spending growth. Further income tax cuts in April are the last thing the economy needs, and without them the Bank might not be pushing for its quarter point rise in base rates. This, rather than the monthly monetary meeting, is where politics is really intruding into the management of the economy. Higher taxes, not higher interest rates, is what Britain really needs, but nobody's going to admit that in the run up to an election.

The truth behind the Euro-pensions scare

Europe's pensions muddle has provided a wonderful ammunition for the euro-phobes. Essentially, the argument is that the Maastricht criteria for joining the single currency should reflect the enormous future pen-

sions burden faced by countries such as France, Germany and Italy. If these liabilities were included in state borrowing figures, their public finances would look such a sorry mess compared with the UK that nobody could possibly hope to qualify.

The most recent eruption of the scare came when the Commons social services committee said last October that British taxpayers could end up subsidising the unfunded pension liabilities of other member states. Either the European central bank would have to relax policy by printing money, or countries that could not afford their pension liabilities would try to borrow their way out of a tight corner. This would raise the yield on euro bonds and damage investment and employment in the UK, even though its pension costs are under control.

Now along comes the Action Centre for Europe to explode this view. It points out that the Maastricht Treaty prevents the kind of political interference that would force the central bank into printing money, for pensions or anything else.

The stability pact would also guard against the risk of a surge in borrowing to pay for pensions. But the Centre's most important argument is that pension promises, the cause of the problem because they are so binding in much of the EU, are not legally binding obligations, as the British government has proved since 1981 by cutting the real value of state pensions.

The effect of monetary union, therefore,

will not so much be to burden Britain with other people's obligations but rather to put even heavier pressure on Italy, Germany and France to cut benefits.

The argument about who pays often gets confused with the separate question of whether pensions should be funded or not. A switch to private funding of itself will not get European economies off the pensions book. The basic economic problem is the high proportion of total national resources required to finance an ageing population, irrespective of whether the money is found from privately funded schemes or from government pay-as-you-go pensions.

The likely upshot is that state and private provision will be forced downwards. As in most other areas of social policy, Britain has led the way in the drive to impoverish the elderly. On top of lower state pensions, the UK private sector is also taking out of final salary schemes and switching to money purchase pensions, where benefits are generally much lower. The Continent looks destined to follow.

Old King Coal is still thinking big

How they laughed at Richard Budge when he raised £815m to buy the English coalfields back in 1994. The bankers might just get their money back, they sniggered, but investors in his RJB Mining group would be skinned alive as soon as its coal contracts with

the two electricity generators expired in 1998. Well, Old King Coal has paid his debt back in double quick time and although the shares have fallen a long way from their peak, RJB is still in business. That is more than can be said for some of the other coal entrepreneurs who persuaded investors to put their money down shafts in the ground.

However, the nearer Mr Budge gets to renegotiating his coal contracts, the more nervous investors get. After all, 80 per cent of the 37 million tonnes he produces is riding on the outcome.

Mr Budge yesterday unveiled part of the solution. If some of his market disappears, then he will just go out and create a new one by building a £300m power station based on clean coal technology. The 400 megawatt plant next to Kellingley Colliery in West Yorkshire would consume 1 million tonnes of coal a year and would, says RJB, produce electricity at 3p a kilowatt hour.

Mr Budge has been persuasive enough to get Teesco on board as a partner. The Americans have had a slightly smaller power station based on the same technology up and running in Tampa, Florida since last December. As his coalfields bid demonstrated, Mr Budge likes to think big. Kellingley, he says is only the beginning, there is a £500m market out there for power stations of this type, particularly as the Pacific Rim countries expand their coal burning capacity. Mr Budge has proved the doubters wrong once but can he pull the same trick off a second time?

PolyGram blames slipped discs for 18% downturn

Patrick Toohar

PolyGram, the world's largest record company, yesterday underlined the problems besetting the global music industry by reporting a sharp drop in annual profits.

Aging rock stars, the general lack of new blockbuster acts and maturing markets for compact discs are being blamed for the overall slowdown in sales, despite mainly favourable economic conditions world-wide.

Last year PolyGram, majority-owned by Philips, the Dutch electronics group, saw net income drop by 18 per cent to 608m guilders (£197m).

The biggest hit came in the music division where operating profits fell from 1.15bn guilders to 1.11bn guilders. A 160m guilders charge was also taken to cover the cost of making around 550 staff redundant.

"This was a challenging year for PolyGram's music division, particularly in the US where market instability is likely to persist for next six to 12 months," said Alain Levy, president and chief executive officer.

In response, PolyGram is re-vamping its Motown operation by moving the famous soul music label's headquarters from Los Angeles to New York in a bid to recreate its heydays of the 1960s and early 1970s.

The group's European music distribution and marketing are also being reorganised and its classical music division is being restructured.

Mr Levy admitted the \$41bn (£25bn) global music market had reached a plateau in 1996,

when it grew by only 3 per cent after several years of double-digit increases, but he forecast future annual growth rates of at least 5 per cent. "We do not believe the music business to be a mature industry," he said.

Nevertheless, Mr Levy acknowledged there was a shortage of good record releases. "I think the issue is one of creativity. The music makes the market," he said.

PolyGram was dealt another blow before Christmas when the Irish band U2 delayed the release of their new album, *Pop*, until next month.

Significantly, no PolyGram act sold more than 5 million albums for the first time in recent years, increasing the record company's hefty marketing costs as a proportion of sales. PolyGram's top selling album in 1996 was The Cranberries' *No Need to Argue*, which sold 4.4 million copies, followed by Bryan Adams' *18 All Stars* at 3.9 million.

Industry observers say the six big record companies, which control almost 80 per cent of all music sales, are trying to cater for increasingly fragmented local markets and tastes at the expense of established pop stars.

"At the local level each individual record company is selling their own indigenous artist. That means the likes of Phil Collins, Sting and Bryan Adams are not selling in the volumes they used to," said Martin Talbot of *Music Week* magazine.

Analysts are also concerned that the growing popularity of sounds such as hip-hop, country and gospel - coupled with an

aging listenership - mean the music industry is unlikely to grow at historical rates without a new and exciting technology. "We do not believe there is a high probability that one sound will transcend enough of the market niches to be as broadly popular as it may have been in the past," commented Goldman Sachs, the US investment bank, in a report.

New technology, notably the emergence of compact discs (CDs) and the portable Sony Walkman in the early Eighties, was a key driver of music sales as fans shifted entire record collections from vinyl to the new format.

Nothing new is on the horizon today. The arrival of the digital compact cassette (DCC) was almost still-born while demand for Sony's Mini Disc looks limited to Japan, which has always had a stronger appetite for new technology. And although music companies and retailers have created web sites on the Internet, they are unlikely to appeal to a mass market over the next two to three years.

While bootlegging has become less of a problem, at least in the developed economies, the growth of discount retailers like Wal-Mart in the US - the world's largest music market - and the greater buying clout of supermarkets in Europe have added to pressure on record companies' margins.

This in turn has led to a greater concentration of sales of top 40 hits at the expense of back-catalogue sales, which used to earn some big labels up to 40 per cent of their income. All this has affected sentiment towards EMI and PolyGram, the two quoted European record companies whose shares have been sliding down the stock market charts in the last six months. EMI has fallen from 1.485p to 1.161p, while PolyGram has slipped from 100 guilders to as low as 76 guilders.

But nobody is writing off the music giants yet. Indeed, the success of Britpop in spawning bands like Oasis, Blur and Pulp has breathed new life into British music industry.

Centrica to trade on Exchange from Monday as shareholders vote for group to be split



Splitting up: David Varney (left) and Richard Giordano at the split-up

British Gas exodus of 4,000 to cost £500m

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

A further 4,000 staff applied to leave British Gas in the last three months of 1996, it was confirmed yesterday, as shareholders backed the management's plans to split the group into two separate companies.

The continuing deluge of staff means 10,000 additional employees have taken advantage of British Gas's voluntary redundancy programme on top of the 25,000 job cuts outlined in the original plans.

Demerger documents published last month revealed the group is to spend a further £500m to fund the extra job cuts, on top of the £1.65bn restructuring charge which launched the programme in 1993.

Yesterday's extraordinary general meeting at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham featured the usual flood of shareholder anger at British Gas's service problems. Including last year's high-profile difficulties with a computer billing system.

The proceedings reached a climax when Neville Goldrein, a small investor, moved an amendment that Richard Giordano should be sacked from the chairman's job. Mr Goldrein found a seconder from the audience, but his motion was

overwhelmingly defeated on a show of hands.

However, the gathering was smaller than some recent British Gas shareholder meetings, with a turnout of only 473 investors. However, interest in the postal vote was more impressive, with 335,000 shareholders voting out of a total of about 1.7 million. British Gas said small investors had voted by a margin of 10 to one in favour of the demerger, with big City investors predictably giving their support.

The vote means British Gas's supply division will trade from Monday as a separate quoted company, Centrica, though it will continue to use the old name on customer bills. British Gas will run the pipeline network and gas exploration activities under a new group name, BG, to be headed by David Varney.

Centrica shares have already risen strongly since trading began on the unofficial "grey market" this week, and gained another 5p to 71p yesterday. Former executives are likely to breathe a sigh of relief that yesterday's gathering was the company's last shareholders' meeting in its current guise. In the years since Cedric Brown's bumper pay rise these events have turned into a savage public attack on the management. Investment column, page 22

Lloyds Abbey Life profits surge

Magnus Grimstad

Lloyds Abbey Life yesterday confirmed the continued bounce-back in the life and pensions market from the mis-selling scandals with a storming 30 per cent rise in profits to £548m.

The record figures for the 12 months to December - the last as a separately quoted company and pensioners market yesterday by Don Cruickshank, the US industry regulator, writes Chris Godsmark.

In a speech in Washington last night he comprehensively demolished the attack on the merger launched by AT&T arguing that Britain offered competitive opportunities for new phone companies which were "equal to any in the world, if not better".

The comments came as merger documents filed in the US showed the two top MCI executives will receive a \$130m (£80m) bonanza of share options if the deal succeeds.

Without naming BT or

the record £2.5bn profits the bank itself is expected to report in its own 1996 results due out tomorrow.

The LAL figures were driven by strong growth in unit trust and pension sales. Although LAL has taken a further £13.7m charge for pension mis-selling, bringing the total provision to £96.6m, Laurel Powers-Freeling, finance director, said: "People are more confident buying pensions again and I think that will continue."

Economic conditions were favourable, while the industry had come through the bad publicity, she believed.

But the big growth in 1996 came in unit trust sales, which soared 56 per cent to £505m, against a 5 per cent increase in regular premiums to £127m and a 6 per cent uptick in single premiums to £704m. Mrs Powers-Freeling said the unit trust performance was economically driven. "The whole industry has done well and in a time of rising equity markets people are attracted to unit trusts," she added.

The biggest contributor to the increased profits was Black Horse Financial Services, the broker dedicated to selling to

the bank's customer base which is shortly to be merged with the TSB life insurance operations. Profits there soared 32 per cent to £160m.

Other strong performers in the year were Lloyds Bank Insurance Services, the broking operation, where profits climbed 44 per cent to £133m and Black Horse Agencies, the estate agency chain. That returned to the black with a £4m profit, reversing a £9.5m loss last year. Abbey Life, the business aimed at independent financial intermediaries, saw its profits rise 12 per cent to £167m.

Schroders to stand by Clyde

Gulf Canada has given up hope of gaining the support of Clyde Petroleum's largest shareholder as its £500m bid for the British oil explorer approaches a nail-biting climax, writes Tom Stevenson.

Schroders, which holds 19 per cent of Clyde's shares, is understood to see more value in the company than Gulf's final 120p-a-share offer which closes next Tuesday and is expected to stand by the incumbent management.

Schroders' decision could be enough to swing the bid in Clyde's favour after PDM, its second-largest shareholder, sold its 14.6 per cent stake earlier this week. That gave Gulf just under 29.9 per cent of Clyde, the limit imposed by Takeover Panel rules, and appeared to put the Canadian company in a commanding position.

Gulf is focusing its efforts on securing the 20 per cent it needs from holders of the 50 per cent of shares not held by itself or Schroders.

Schroders would not comment yesterday on its decision, except to say that it had not yet made up its mind. Gulf has meetings scheduled for today and tomorrow with undecided shareholders, including Schroders, at which it will attempt to gain the support of the remaining floating voters.

In a final exchange of letters yesterday the two sides wrote to shareholders with their final arguments. Gulf focused on the potential for a fall in Clyde's share price, if it escapes the bid.

Bim Bim of Cairo gives Cadbury a bite of the Middle East market

Nigel Cope

Cadbury Schweppes has embarked on an Arabian adventure with the acquisition of Egypt's largest chocolate company. It has paid an undisclosed sum for Bim Bim, the curiously named Cairo company which controls 26 per cent of Egypt's confectionery market and is the dominant player in the whole of the Middle East and North Africa region.

Though selling chocolate in Africa might sound trying to sell ice lollies to Eskimos, Cadbury says the local market is growing strongly and that candy bars are popular snacks. "It's not baking hot there all the time," a spokeswoman said.

Founded in Cairo in 1961, Bim Bim is privately owned and

the controlling family has asked that its identity not be disclosed. Though the purchase price has also not been revealed, Bim Bim recorded sales of £32m last year and has net assets of £35m. Its most popular brands of chocolate bar are Gussy and Sando, while another is called Mummy.

Bim Bim controls 13 per cent of the Middle Eastern confectionery market. Cadbury already has an Egyptian business but was keen to strengthen its position in a region of more than 120 million people.

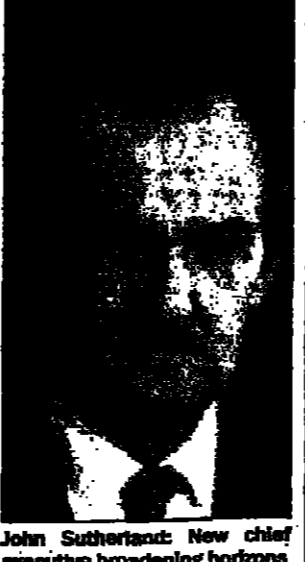
"Ian Johnstone, managing director of Cadbury Schweppes said: "Bim Bim, in conjunction with Cadbury Egypt, will give us market leadership in both Egypt and the region and put us in a very strong position to benefit from further growth."

The move comes a day after Cadbury Schweppes, under its new chief executive John Smedley, confirmed it had completed the £623m sale of its joint venture Coca Cola bottling plants.

In a separate move yesterday Cadbury Schweppes announced that it was to market to British consumers a line in quality continental European chocolate bars made by Poultin of France. It has launched three bars from Poultin - in dark, plain and vanilla-flavoured white chocolate - aimed at the serious chocolate lover.

"Consumers have become more accustomed to continental tastes and have consequently developed a more sophisticated palate," Cadbury said.

Cadbury shares closed 3.5p lower at 478.5p.



John Sutherland: New chief executive broadening horizons

BT deal with MCI gets Cruickshank's backing

British Telecom's drive to obtain approval in the US for its £12bn takeover of long-distance operator MCI was given a significant boost yesterday by Don Cruickshank, the US industry regulator, writes Chris Godsmark.

In a speech in Washington last night he comprehensively demolished the attack on the merger launched by AT&T arguing that Britain offered competitive opportunities for new phone companies which were "equal to any in the world, if not better".

The comments came as merger documents filed in the US showed the two top MCI executives will receive a \$130m (£80m) bonanza of share options if the deal succeeds.

AT&T directly, Mr Cruickshank attacked claims from the US that it was difficult for rival operators to gain access to the British market. The US regulator, the Federal Communications Commission, has said it will only approve the merger if it can be demonstrated that US carriers have as much chance of breaking into the UK market as British operators will have in America.

AT&T, which is expanding its UK operations, claims it has been hampered by the UK's "indirect access" system, where its customers have to dial a three-digit code to get access to the company's long-distance services. The US carrier argues that BT's dominance of local residential phone lines means rival operators will always face a

competitive disadvantage. In the US long-distance carriers enjoy direct access to customers, a system known as dialling parity.

However, Mr Cruickshank said the indirect access policy was the only way to encourage the cable companies to build local phone networks. He said: "This is perhaps the difference between our two regulatory frameworks which it is hardest for Americans to understand.... For the UK dialling parity is not the lynchpin of market opening. Far from it."

Though the comments were also a clear defence of Mr Cruickshank's own record, they were welcomed by BT sources. An AT&T spokesman declined to comment, though the speech is likely to be viewed by the group as a significant setback.

US court throws on case over De Lorea

Michael Harrison

The Government was facing a legal bill of up to \$500m when a US court threw out a lawsuit against the firm Arthur Andersen, the collapse of the De Lorea plant in west Belgium. Judge M B Miles said that the Government's legal case against the firm was "untenable" because the accounts could not be reconciled with the Southern District of New York. He added that the Government could not win its case in a state court but if it did, a claim to its credit could be estimated at \$110m to \$120m.

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business

Shareholders back Centrica spin-off from British Gas

British Gas paved the way for the demerger of its Centrica gas production to distribution business yesterday with an overwhelming show of support from shareholders at an extraordinary meeting in Birmingham. But investors could be in for a bumpy ride when the new shares start trading separately from the British Gas rump, to be imaginatively renamed BG, on Monday.

Already the grey market, which started at the beginning of the week ahead of official dealings, is pointing the way. Last week a Centrica warrant launched by Barclays de Zoete Wedd was putting an implied price of around 50p on the shares. Yet in grey market trading yesterday the price was up another 5p to 75.5p. Meanwhile, the rump BG has steadily slid from a 186p opening to 163.5p, down 3.75p yesterday.

Although grey market dealings are notoriously unreliable in predicting the level at which real trading eventually settles down, the trend is supported by those reading the runes. Analysts reckon Centrica has more going for it than BG, over which the

cloud of the gas regulator's proposals last year to slash 20 per cent from its revenues still hangs.

The old management team which locked Centrica into buying gas at way above market prices has gone, while, paradoxically, the spot price has been going up again this winter. How close it gets to Centrica's average cost of gas, put at just under 20p a therm by NatWest Markets, will be crucial for valuing the company. At 14p, NatWest reckons the asset value is 66p, rising to 99p if the price rises to 16p.

Key questions will be how many people switch away from the company's necessarily high prices as the market is opened up to competition. In the limited competition trials thus far, the British Gas brand, which Centrica keeps, is limiting the damage.

Centrica is also being spun off with a very useful dowry in the shape of the Morecambe Bay gas field. It is only the profits and cash from that highly valuable asset, worth £2.5bn according to analysts, which will keep the group in the black for the first few years of its independent existence. It could also prove a useful bargaining tool in any fur-

ther deals with oil companies to shed the burden of the long-term gas contracts.

Finally, both Morecambe and Centrica's customer base could prove attractive to bidders ranging from US utilities to big oil groups like Shell and even perhaps electricity companies like PowerGen, already big in gas, or Scottish Hydro, which nearly bought the Scottish end last year.

BG, meanwhile, looks something of a Cinderella stock. It is heavily regulated, yet with a golden share which would prove a potent block to takeover and a dividend which could tumble from 14.5p to 5.5p on some estimates. Centrica shares, promising no dividend yield, will be subject to selling pressure from income funds, but bid talk makes them worth holding.

Disposals cheer Rexam

Shares in Rexam, the former Bowater packaging business, have underperformed the FTSE All-Share by a thumping

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN
EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

40 per cent in the last two years so it is hardly surprising that the company is facing a mountain of negative sentiment.

After two profits warnings in a year under the previous management investors have seen the stock slide from 517p in summer 1995 to 328p, down 1.5p yesterday.

But with new management, led by Swedish chief executive Rolf Borjesson, in place since last July, the City is weighing up

whether Rexam is on the turn. In December Mr Borjesson announced his intention to sell 20 underperforming businesses.

Yesterday, two found early buyers, with Otis Specialty Papers going to Wausau Paper Mills, the US market leader, for £36m and PT Rexam Mulox of Indonesia sold to a local group for £1.3m.

These deals came earlier than many in the City had been expecting and there were en-

couraging noises from analysts yesterday about the rhetoric being backed up by some action.

Going forward, disposals are likely to prove harder and more costly. The two businesses sold yesterday were two of the more attractive divisions in Rexam Octagon, the special unit set up last year to encompass all the assets due for disposal. Some of the other businesses are loss-makers whose sale is likely to see Rexam incur asset write-offs.

Other businesses tipped for sale include folding cartons for food and drink and non-lipstick cosmetic packaging. The health-care, building and engineering operations are not affected.

As Mr Borjesson gets to grips with Rexam he should be able to wring more cost-cutting out, with some removal of surplus capacity expected. With pulp prices near the bottom of the cycle the trick will be to hang on to packaging margins rather than being forced to cut prices.

Rexam's 1996 results, due next month, should show pre-tax profits of £164m, with Charterhouse Tilney forecasting £190m in 1997. That puts the shares on a forward rating of 15

falling to 13. Not cheap but worth holding to see if the new management can deliver on its promises.

Compel set for re-rating

Compel has flourished on the back of rising demand from large corporations for someone else to come in and deal with all that confusing information technology stuff. It's a competitive market, but the margins squeezed out of clients such as the Post Office, British Nuclear Fuels and Robert Fleming are healthy and rising.

Compel came to the market in 1994 via a placing at 125p. Yesterday shares bounced 5p to 197.5p after a useful 18 per cent jump in half-year profits to £1.7m. Earnings per share were up by a similar margin to 7.09p.

Focusing on the networks of desktop computers that are gradually taking over from previous generations of mainframes, Compel designs systems, supplies the hardware and software to run them, in-

stalls the equipment and trains the staff who will use them. As systems become more complex, Compel becomes ever more important to the end-user and relationships tend, as a result, to be fairly stable and long-term.

About 80 per cent of Compel's turnover is accounted for by only 30 clients, which might cause some concern about earnings quality except that in the past 12 months the company has not lost one large customer.

Growth will come from a number of areas. The trend away from mainframes towards shared servers will continue and corporates will continue to increase their IT budgets. That will increase the size of the cake while Compel should continue to increase the size of its slice by taking share from smaller competitors.

On the basis of forecast profits of £4.75m in the year to June and £7m the following year, the shares trade on a forward price/earnings ratio of 12.5 falling to 11. That's a stingy rating for growth of more than 20 per cent and the shares look set for a re-rating. Good value.

Rexam: At a glance

Market value: £1.65bn, share price: 328p

Five-year record

92 93 94 95 96*

Pre-tax profits 147.2 212 226 180 164 (m)

Dividends per share (pence) 11.1 12.55 13.8 14.1 14.1

*Forecast

Share price pence



Winning a National Training Award means prestige, better recruits, publicity and a certain amount of quiet satisfaction.



IN BRIEF

C&W makes £40m on Swedish sale

Cable & Wireless has made a profit of £40m after selling just over half its stake in a Swedish telecommunications operator, NetCom Systems. The news sent C&W's shares surging ahead to close 12.5p higher at 508.5p. C&W made its original 30.9 per cent investment in the Swedish Telic2 venture in 1990, but last year the stake was swapped for NetCom shares. The sale means C&W's 10.1 per cent holding in NetCom has dropped to 4.6 per cent. C&W insisted the sale did not have wider strategic implications, following the severing of the group's interest in the German Vebacom venture.

Ushers to float at up to £120m

Ushers of Trowbridge, the West Country brewer, is taking a cautious approach to its second attempt at a stock market flotation. Although, not yet finalised, Ushers' flotation price is expected to be calculated on the basis of a historic price/earnings ratio of less than 12, a discount to both the market and other quoted regional brewers. Ushers pulled its last planned flotation in 1994, but chief executive Roger North (right) believes the company has addressed the issues that worried investors then.



Impact day, when the institutional placing will be priced, is expected to be 4 March and the company is understood to be planning a £40m cash-raising to give a market value between £100m and £120m. Ushers also announced the appointment of Tom Vyner, deputy chairman of J Sainsbury, as non-executive chairman.

Brussels investigates French film aid

The European Commission is opening an inquiry into Fr2.5bn (£270m) of French state aid for the Société Française de Production, a TV and film production firm which is being privatised. At the same time, the commission has approved Fr350m of urgent aid to prevent SFP's financial collapse, while the French authorities complete the restructuring plan.

PIA board shrinks to 17 members

The Personal Investment Authority, the financial services regulator, is to reduce the size of its board from 21 to 17 members. The reduction will take place at the PIA's general meeting in July, when four directors, two in the public-interest category and two practitioner members, stand down.

Whesoe sells out to Siebe

Whesoe has agreed an offer by Siebe at 155p per share. The offer values the entire issued share capital of Whesoe at about £46m. There will be a share alternative of 31 new Siebe shares for every 200 Whesoe shares.

Eagle Star expands in Ireland

BAT Industries' subsidiary Eagle Star has paid New Ireland Holdings IRE30m for Irish National Insurance. BAT said the acquisition will almost double Eagle Star's general insurance premium income in Ireland and increase its market share above 10 per cent.

Labour sticks to plan for super-SIB

Labour's shadow economic secretary, Mike O'Brien (left), yesterday reaffirmed his party's plans for financial services regulators to be brought under the single umbrella of the Securities and Investments Board. There will be a distinction made between wholesale and retail market regulation, with the former having a "lighter touch". But he added that Labour did not want a US-style Securities and Exchange Commission, which he believes would be inappropriate to this country.

Mr O'Brien, speaking to a City audience at a lecture sponsored by Imro, the fund managers' regulator, said he also wanted to simplify many of the rules governing the industry. "We would rather have four rules that worked than 400 which tried to catch every eventuality but just succeeded in confusing everyone."

Lang clears four bids

Ian Lang, Secretary for Trade and Industry, has decided not to refer the proposed acquisition by Lowndes Lambert Group Holdings of Fenchurch to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Other clearances announced yesterday were the acquisition by Clariant UK of the paper chemical business of Hickson & Welch, the acquisition by Kingfisher's subsidiary Comet Group of Norweb's retail division and the Firstbus takeover of the local bus business of Stotts Coaches of Oldham.

American offers pilots new deal

American Airlines said it has offered the Applied Pilots Association a new labour contract ahead of the expiry of the union's deadline on Saturday for calling a vote on the strike.

Company Results

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Compel Group (p)	39.5m (40.4m)	1.70m (1.44m)	7.09p (6.06p)	1.6p (1.54p)
Internet Tech (*)	157m (-)	-1.01m (-)	-11.07p (-)	-
Prepart Leisure (p)	3.2m (2.1m)	1.02m (0.50m)	3.49p (2.7p)	-
Life Sciences (p)	230m (205m)	127.2m (24.0m)	10.1p (9p)	4.5p (-)
Pearson's Group (p)	5.8m (5.7m)	0.18m (0.17m)	4.22p (1.25p)	-
Placid Holdings (p)	43.6m (38.7m)	5.5m (2.9m)	6.4p (5.3p)	2.25p (2.5p)
Vicent Action (p)	95.1m (78.2m)	8.31m (5.8m)	14.2p (13.85p)	4.7p (-)

(p) - Final (p) - Interim (*) - 7 mth period † pre-tax profit pre-exceptional charges

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market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100	4304.3	unch.
FTSE 250	4574.5	-12.1
FTSE 380	2124.7	-1.1
SEAQ VOLUME	1bn shares	
48,994 bargains		
Gilt Index	96.54	+0.20

Share spotlight

Share	Price	Change
BP	125.50	+0.50
British Airways	105.00	+0.50
British Petroleum	125.50	+0.50
British Telecom	105.00	+0.50
British Water	105.00	+0.50
British Airways	105.00	+0.50
British Petroleum	125.50	+0.50
British Telecom	105.00	+0.50
British Water	105.00	+0.50

Grey market foreshadows a volatile debut for Centrica

Taking Stock

MARKET REPORT DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Independence could be a sweet but short-lived experience for Centrica, about to be split from British Gas.

The gas supply business has already shown a remarkable degree of assertiveness since the Stock Exchange allowed grey dealings in a when issued form of its shares to start on Monday.

They have displayed astonishing volatility, perhaps indicating predatory intentions. In busy trading yesterday the shares touched 76.75p, setting 5p ahead at 75.5p.

The list of potential bidders seems to grow by the day. Shell has for long been in the frame so has National Power. Now a host of overseas groups has been lined up as well as a range of UK utilities with PowerGen and ScottishPower in the frame.

The great Gas implosion is set for next week when BG, the transportation side, sheds Cen-



tricia, the gas supply business which has been allowed, for some illogical reason, to hang on to the Morecambe Bay oil field.

The BG shares, underlining the Centrica contribution, were unchanged at 239p. The BG side fell 4p to 163.5p.

The rest of the stock market achieved the remarkable feat of, as far as blue chips were concerned, ending unchanged. Yes, Footsie, after moving between extremes of a 20 point gain and a 10.7 fall managed to end all square - at 4,304.3.

The supporting index did at least manage to point to a direction - downwards, with the FTSE 250 measurement losing 12.1 to 4,574.5.

The rampant pound destroyed what could have been an up-and-away day for shares. With New York in surprisingly resolute form equities could have been

expected to put on a stirring display.

But the festering sore of sterling's strength erupted to hit a string of leading exporters. Rolls-Royce plunged 12.5p to 220p, British Aerospace 35.5p to 1,190p and General Electric Co 9p to 383.5p.

A gnawing story that a big rights issue is being prepared was another inhibiting influence. The rumour was that a £1bn-plus cash call was in the pipeline. Reuters, said to be buying Dow Jones & Co, was one name in the frame. So was a host of drug groups as well as an array of financial operations.

Reuters did have an event-

ful day as, it appeared, bears were squeezed. The shares ended 24.5p higher at 650.5p in brisk trading.

Imperial Chemical Industries rose 6.5p to 758.5p as SEC Warburg moved its stance to buy and Whitebread put on 10p to 816.5p following a meeting with analysts.

Cable & Wireless added 12.5p to 508.5p as Merrill Lynch produced a 600p target price. Pearson rose 15p to 763.5p as Michael Price, the US investor stalking Dow Jones & Co, was said to have put together a 1 per cent shareholding.

Mr Price, who has 5.4 per cent of Dow Jones, is reputed

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, including exceptional items.

Other data: 1 Ex rights; 2 Ex dividend; 3 Ex all UK United Securities Market's Suspended; 4 Partly Paid; 5 All Shares; 6 All Stocks.

Source: FT Information

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from London Stock Exchange. Simply dial 0800 123 333, and when prompted to dial 48 to enter the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports dial 0800 123 333 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

FTSE 100 - Real-time	01	Starting Rates	04	Privatisation Issues	16
UK Stock Market Report	02	Full Report	05	Water Shares	30
UK Company News	03	Valuation Report	06	Electricity Shares	38
Foreign Exchange	04	UK Market	07	High Street Banks	41

Anyone with a tone-dial telephone can use the service. For a detailed description of the Independent Index, including its portfolio facility, phone 0800 123 333. For assistance call our helpline 071 675 4378 (9am-5pm).

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume
BP	24,000	Rolls Royce	19,000	British Telecom	18,000
British Airways	22,000	British Petroleum	18,000	British Water	18,000
British Petroleum	20,000	British Telecom	18,000	British Water	18,000
British Telecom	18,000	British Water	18,000	British Airways	18,000

FTSE 100 index hour by hour

Time	Index	Time	Index
09:00	4304.3	12:00	4304.3
10:00	4304.3	13:00	4304.3
11:00	4304.3	14:00	4304.3

Telecommunications

Company	Price	Change
British Telecom	105.00	+0.50
Telecom Italia	105.00	+0.50
Telecom France	105.00	+0.50

Telecommunications

Company	Price	Change
British Telecom	105.00	+0.50
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1408, 1409, 1410, 1411, 1412, 1413, 1414, 1415, 1416, 1417, 1418, 1419, 1420, 1421, 1422, 1423, 1424, 1425, 1426, 1427, 1428, 1429, 1430, 1431, 1432, 1433, 1434, 1435, 1436, 1437, 1438, 1439, 1440,

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Saints to move for Via

yesterday that his Ferrari will not be good enough to win this season's F1 championship. "I don't yet have the car to become champion, but I hope to make progress. The car is faster and easier to drive," he said after six

Saints try to move in for Vialli

Football

TOMMY STANFORTH

Gianluca Vialli, Chelsea's unsettled Italian striker, is having talks with the Southampton manager, Graeme Souness.

The Italian international yesterday had a working breakfast with Souness at the Grand Harbour Hotel, on Southampton's waterfront. The two are believed to have discussed details of a possible move to The Dell for the 32-year-old Vialli, who has fallen out of favour at Stamford Bridge and has criticised the Chelsea manager, Ruud Geul, for leaving him out of the first team.

Chelsea have consistently rebuffed speculation that they wish to sell Vialli, but the Saints have not denied their interest. Southampton claim that Souness is on holiday and is "uncontactable" while their director of football, Lawrie McMenemy, said: "You had better ask the manager."

Souness and Vialli are old friends from the manager's spell as a player at Sampdoria, where the Italian used to clean his boots. Previously Souness has said of Vialli: "He has kept himself in good shape and lived right - he is a fine player and will do well wherever he plays."

Rangers are expected to sign Sweden's captain, Jonas Thern, from Roma in the summer - with the player set to earn a staggering £835,000 a year.

The Scottish champions look favourites to sign the 29-year-old midfielder after he admitted that it would be hard to refuse the offer he has received

from the Glasgow club. The Rangers chairman, David Murray, is reported to have offered Thern a minimum two-year, maximum three-year, contract.

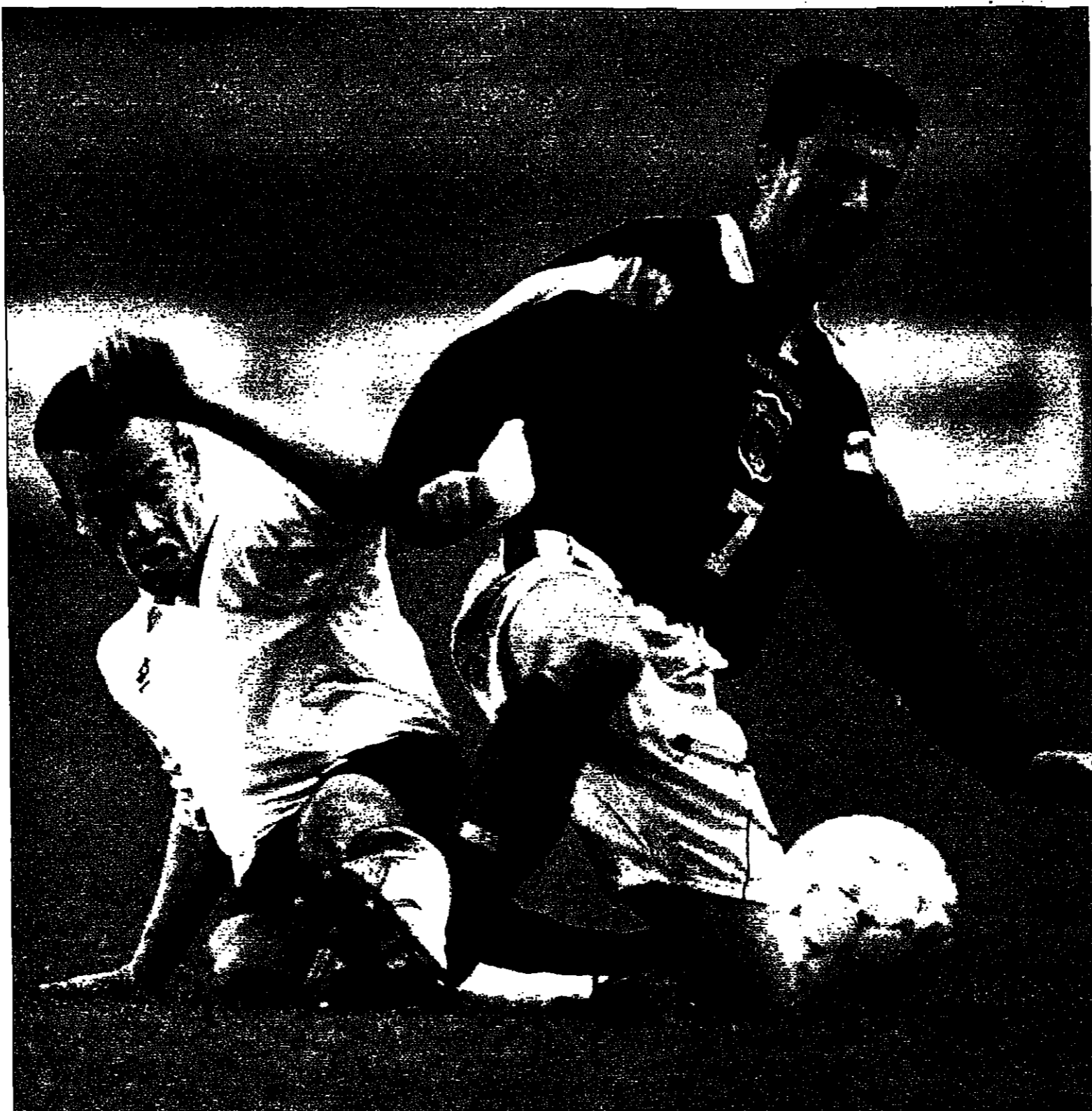
Thern revealed that three other clubs have been offered - from Benfica, Napoli and Roma - would have to be combined to match what Rangers have put up. His international team-mate, Joachim Björklund, is already at Ibrox.

Thern will leave Roma on a free transfer at the end of the season even though Napoli, Fiorentina and Parma have all shown an interest in him. The Swede has also attracted attention from three clubs in his home country - Malmö, Helsingborg and IFK Gothenburg.

Alphonse Tchami, a 25-year-old striker who played for Cameroon at the 1994 World Cup in the United States, has joined Sunderland on trial from Boca Juniors, of Argentina, with a view to a £1.4m transfer.

The Bayern Munich president, Franz Beckenbauer, has fuelled speculation that he is to quit his post to become Germany's first Sports Minister. "I have no passion for what I am doing here," the 51-year-old former World Cup winner said. "It is high time the sport had its own ministry."

The Lincoln City midfielder, Terry Fleming, has been charged with misconduct by the Football Association after allegedly giving a false name (that of team-mate Tony Dennis) to avoid being sent off. The 24-year-old was booked twice in seven minutes during the first half of their Third Division game against Wigan nine days ago.



John Collins, of Scotland, is brought to his knees by Estonia's Mati Päril in Tuesday's goalless draw in Monaco

Photograph: Mike Egerton/Emphas

Quinn makes a hit Scotland show inadequacies Gould's satisfaction

A fresh-faced fans' favourite looks likely to challenge Iain Dowie for the front-running role when Northern Ireland face Portugal in their World Cup qualifying next month.

West Ham's Dowie is still recovering from a broken ankle which has ruled him out of the games with Italy in Palermo and the 3-0 victory over Belgium on Tuesday night. He is expected to be fit again for the 29 March 1997 match against Portugal at Windsor Park, Belfast, but he may not regain his international place because of the impression made by the Blackpool forward James Quinn.

Quinn, who has scored 13 goals this season for Blackpool, has made himself a hit with the Irish supporters, with his mobility, pace and shooting power. "He has been a real find - a player who can establish himself at international level," said Northern Ireland's manager, Bryan Hamilton.

In addition, Hamilton can call on Phil Gould, who plays in the Netherlands for Fortuna Sittard, Stoke's Gerard McMahon, Manchester United's Philip

Murphy and George O'Boyle, of St Johnstone.

But he warned: "Let's not get carried away by the 3-0 victory over Belgium. A lot of hard work lies ahead, but at least we are making progress."

Northern Ireland's hopes of qualifying for France 98 are still remote - with Germany favourites to qualify from group nine - although victory over an erratic Portuguese side would keep the campaign going. Maximum points from trips to Ukraine and Armenia in April and May would ensure a capacity crowd for the visit of the Germans to Belfast in August.

Hamilton is expected to include Murphy and Manchester City's 18-year-old midfielder, Jeff Whitley, in the squad against Portugal. "We must get Whitley into a competitive fixture, which means he could not be approached by any other country," Hamilton said.

Whitley, the first black player to be selected by the Irish FA at senior level, was born in Zambia, and could play for them or England as he holds a British passport.

PHIL SHAW

With two-thirds of the Group Four fixtures still to be completed, it was never going to be Monte Carlo or bust for Scotland's World Cup prospects. All the same, a goalless display against Estonia in the play-off ground of the Côte d'Azur leaves little margin for error when the quest to qualify resumes in seven weeks' time. The home games against Estonia and Austria, to be played within five days of each other at Kilmarnock and Celtic Park respectively, both now assume a critical importance. Anything less than a six-point haul and Scotland will have surrendered a hard-won initiative, which would also have the effect of putting them under pressure to win in Sweden at the end of April.

As a consequence of events long before football replaced more bloody conflicts, the Scots are invariably more comfortable as underdogs. When expected to win - and neither the players nor their 2,000-strong following in Monaco appeared to

have allowed for any other possibility - the psychological adjustment involved often proves problematic.

That said, Tuesday's failure was as much one of technical and tactical inadequacy as of temperament. When they tried to play through what was basically a nine-man defence, early in the game, the passing was careless and the touch clumsy. The tempo required to drag the Estonian barrier out of shape was conspicuously absent until the 15 minutes before half-time.

During that period, a succession of chances came and went. But having created a modicum of panic through the crosses of Kevin Gallacher, the play went to Scotland's heads. Or rather to Duncan Ferguson's head. In the second half, with Gallacher mysteriously switched inside from the right flank, they resorted to pumping the ball hopefully in the direction of their towering striker.

The impression of it all enabled Estonia's equally ill-equipped goalkeeper, Mart Poom, to take the ball in the air with consid-

erable success. Ferguson, who has scored only once at any level for his country, was fortunate not to be one of the three Scots substituted. Of those who were taken off, Paul McStay was a half-paced shadow of his former self, cementing the impression that he and Gary McAllister tend to duplicate each other.

At least now Scotland can be under no illusions as to the task facing them when Estonia visit Ayrshire on 29 March. Needless to say, the Estonians enjoyed the jaunt hugely and must now feel that their extraordinary decision not to turn up for the original fixture in Tallinn has been vindicated.

As a result of adding a point to their modest tally, the players from the tiny Baltic state also earned a bonus of £250 a man - equivalent to a month's wages and two and a half times the national monthly average. A vice-president of the Estonian FA, Mart Tarmak, said: "So far it has cost us quite a lot but we're not complaining. We were 128th in the FIFA world rankings, now we're 101st. This draw should help us climb even higher."

GUY HODGSON

On the face of it a goalless home draw in a semi-deserted stadium is nothing to inspire anyone but Bobby Gould was accentuating the positive yesterday. Or least he was in every other aspect except dimensionally.

"After you have shipped seven and three, conceding no goals twice makes you happy," the Wales manager said, reflecting on Tuesday's draw with the Republic of Ireland in Cardiff. "When you take into context that we were fielding four players either making their international or home debut it was satisfactory."

Wales' new-found solidarity after the 10-goal two-game demolition by the Dutch has come since Gary Speed, a winger with Everton, has played as a sweeper. A footballer whose performance has not always been in proportion to his gifts, he has excelled at the centre of defence.

"He's more involved than when he's out wide," Gould said. "He's still in the position where he can't come out and

play but it will come. There were one or two occasions when the Irish where you thought 'here he comes' but it didn't materialise."

Once Speed has the confidence to attack as well as defend it will help solve the Welsh problem of finding invention further forward. An appearance by Ryan Giggs would not be detrimental either.

"The one thing I have to re-address is the Ryan Giggs situation," Gould said. "That will be done privately, without the pressures of the media. If the feelings of the public have not got through to him they will be communicated."

"If Ryan Giggs is not going to play in friendly international matches then the world will be told. People will not be conned. We don't want the situation where people are asking for refunds because he isn't playing."

If Giggs does return for next month's World Cup qualifier against Belgium then he might find the National Stadium in reduced circumstances. Wales are finding the Cardiff pitch too big and measures may be taken to reduce its size.

Krajicek and Cash capture moment

Tennis

JOHN ROBERTS reports from Dubai

It was a day for thoroughbreds. An update on the runners for the \$4m (£2.5) Dubai World Cup in the company of Frankie Dettori was followed by a check on the form of three Wimbledon champions, past and present, two of whom probably would have been shot had they been horses.

Richard Krajicek, the Dutchman who surprised Pete Sampras and the seeding committee with his victory at the All England Club last July, showed encouraging signs of rehabilitation after surgery to his right knee in December, the latest setback in a career handicapped by injuries.

Seeded No. 3 for the \$1m Dubai Open, Krajicek negotiated a difficult opening round against India's Leander Paes, a former Wimbledon junior champion, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2. A fascinating contest ended tamely, with Paes virtually immobile after straining a stomach muscle during the final set.

Krajicek has a film crew in tow, filming the build-up to his defence of the Wimbledon title. "It's a behind-the-scenes look at life on the circuit and shows the sort of life I lead," he said, underlining his determination to allow nothing to prevent his arrival on the Centre Court at 2pm precisely on 23 June when he added, "Even if I have to swim over the Channel, I'll be there."

Pat Cash is also filming here, using a camcorder to capture memories of his trip. The 1987 Wimbledon champion can be found hauling his own tennis baggage nowadays, a sort of Cash-and-carry with a wild card.

Few leading players have suffered as many injuries as the 31-year-old Australian, currently ranked No. 755 in the world, who had one of his best days for ages in defeating Spain's Carlos Costa, 7-6, 7-6.

Cash was at a loss to remember the last time he won a singles match on the main ATP Tour until reminded that it was here two years ago, when he beat Thomas Muster.

Relying on doubles matches to sharpen his form in order to gain entry to singles events, Cash was particularly disappointed to be defeated in the first round here when partnering Tim Henman, the British No. 1. "I'd been looking forward to playing with Tim for a long time, and we both played like crap," Cash said. "But I've learned the things that can turn around quite quickly. Yesterday I felt like retiring. Today I felt quite good."

Boris Becker, Wimbledon champion in 1985, '86 and '89, delivered 26 aces yesterday but still had problems overcoming a young compatriot, Marc-Kevin Goellner, 6-3, 6-7, 6-2. Their only previous match had been at Wimbledon in 1993, Becker winning in four sets.

Yesterday, after a confident start, the seventh-seeded Becker surprisingly lost a second set tie-break, 7-5, and had to save two break points at 2-2 in the final set.

Rehabilitation rules reviewed

Boxing

New methods to determine whether fighters are fit to compete are set to be introduced in the wake of Oliver McCall's emotional breakdown during his World Boxing Council title fight against Lennox Lewis in Las Vegas last week.

Marc Ratner, executive director of the Nevada Athletic Commission, said his boxing

governing body are considering mandatory time limits for fighters to have completed rehabilitation programmes.

"There is culpability to be spread around and I accept it for our commission," Ratner said. "We have to learn from this and reconsider how we do things."

McCall had been taking part in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes during his training for the Lewis fight.

FOOTBALL RESULTS

Yesterday
WALSLEY LEAGUE: Premier Division: Walsley 1, Walsley 2, Walsley 3, Walsley 4, Walsley 5, Walsley 6, Walsley 7, Walsley 8, Walsley 9, Walsley 10, Walsley 11, Walsley 12, Walsley 13, Walsley 14, Walsley 15, Walsley 16, Walsley 17, Walsley 18, Walsley 19, Walsley 20, Walsley 21, Walsley 22, Walsley 23, Walsley 24, Walsley 25, Walsley 26, Walsley 27, Walsley 28, Walsley 29, Walsley 30, Walsley 31, Walsley 32, Walsley 33, Walsley 34, Walsley 35, Walsley 36, Walsley 37, Walsley 38, Walsley 39, Walsley 40, Walsley 41, Walsley 42, Walsley 43, Walsley 44, Walsley 45, Walsley 46, Walsley 47, Walsley 48, Walsley 49, Walsley 50, Walsley 51, Walsley 52, Walsley 53, Walsley 54, Walsley 55, Walsley 56, Walsley 57, Walsley 58, Walsley 59, Walsley 60, Walsley 61, Walsley 62, Walsley 63, Walsley 64, Walsley 65, Walsley 66, Walsley 67, Walsley 68, Walsley 69, Walsley 70, Walsley 71, Walsley 72, Walsley 73, Walsley 74, Walsley 75, Walsley 76, Walsley 77, Walsley 78, Walsley 79, Walsley 80, Walsley 81, 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One of us
Andrew Caddick, England's
Kiwi, away at home, page 26

sport

Generation game
Ken Jones on the age gap
and athletes, page 26

Captain calms club and country

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWETT

Phil de Glanville may not be playing the most persuasive rugby of his career, but at least he is still thinking a good game. England's captain yesterday did his level best to stabilise the mood of his troops in advance of this weekend's hazardous Five Nations confrontation with Ireland in Dublin, appealing for a common-sense approach both on and off the pitch.

It has been an awkward few days for the Bath centre, who must be finding it far easier to captain the national side than to exercise any semblance of control over events at his own club.

The harassed English champions' decision to dump John Hall as their director of rugby on Tuesday came as an ill-timed and unpleasant surprise to the skipper, and he is beginning to doubt whether there is any such thing as a straightforward, trouble-free build-up to an international.

"I'm starting to get used to this," De Glanville said yesterday. "There seems to be some sort of upheaval before every England game. If it's not a problem at Bath, it's someone having a snipe at Jack Rowell's coaching. In the end, you just have to switch off from it and focus yourself on the matter in hand."

Easier said than done. Constant criticism of Rowell's contribution to the England cause, much of it from coaching predecessors, has prompted De Glanville to leap to the defence of his old mentor on several recent occasions and he was banging the same drum before yesterday's training session at Bisham Abbey.

"I think it's important that whoever the Rugby Football Union appoints as coach at the end of the Five Nations campaign is given the job right through to the World Cup in 1999," he said. "What is more, the coach needs to be full-time. There is no other way, now that the pressure to perform is so great."

"If the Rugby Football Union backs Jack - and I hope they do, because he is a shrewd man in-

tellectually and possesses an outstanding rugby brain - it will be down to him as to whether he wants to make that sort of commitment. He has other things going on in his life and he would need to pare those back, but I think it would be very difficult indeed to find anyone with a better understanding of the game."

The clarity of De Glanville's thinking was also evident in his attitude to the severe physical test awaiting him and his side in Dublin.

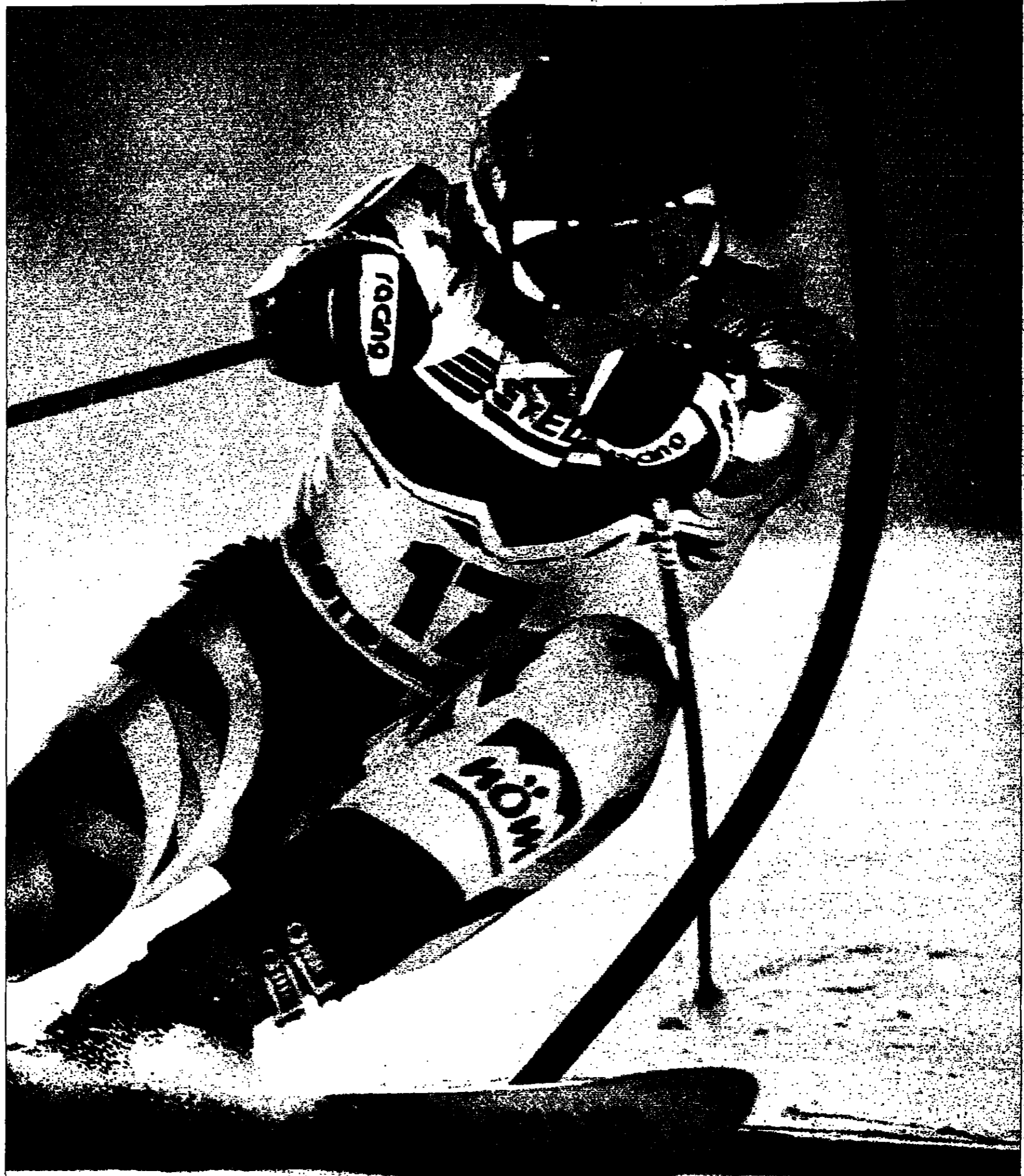
"There are some very hard yards to be fought over at Lansdowne Road," he said. "No one is more aware of that than us and we're not getting carried away by the fact that we scored three tries in five minutes against the Scots a fortnight ago, gratifying though that was. In my view, it is damaging to over-react in rugby, either to defeat or to victory."

The French, legendary over-reactors when it comes to team selection, have made six changes for their match with Wales at the Parc des Princes in Paris. On this occasion, however, they cannot be accused of a knee-jerk approach; injury and suspension has forced them into the revamp of almost a third of their side.

Franck Tournaire, the prop forward unilaterally suspended for kicking Ireland's Allan Clarke in the face during the first round of Five Nations matches last month, is replaced by Jean-Louis Jordana, while Richard Castel gets a run in the back row in place of Philippe Benetton, who has a broken jaw.

Among the three-quarters, Richard Dourthe and Laurent Lefflamand come in at centre and wing in place of the indisposed Thomas Castaignède and Émile Namack respectively. The other changes are at half-back, where the Brive pairing of Philippe Carbonneau and Christophe Lamaison fill in for Fabien Galthie and Alain Penaud.

FRANCE (v Wales, Five Nations) Championship, Parc des Princes, Saturday: J-L Tournaire (Centre); L Lefflamand (Scrummer); R Dourthe (Dec), S Glanville (Scrummer); C Lamaison (Wing), P Carbonneau (Half); F Penaud (Dec), A Benetton (Wing); R Castel (Scrummer), J Jordana (Tighthead Prop); J-L Tournaire (Prop), J-L Tournaire (Prop), J-L Tournaire (Prop).



Andreas Schifferer, of Austria, bends a pole on his way to third place in the giant slalom race at the World Alpine Skiing Championships in Sestriere yesterday. The event was won by Switzerland's Michael von Gruening with the silver medal going to Lasse Kjus, of Norway. Photograph: Michael Leckel/Reuters

Le Tissier's phone call embarrasses Hoddle

Football
ANDREW MARTIN

Matthew Le Tissier is in a tizz. A headline writer's dream certainly, but the Southampton striker's loose lips were feared to have sunk Glenn Hoddle's England side before last night's World Cup qualifier at Wembley had begun.

Le Tissier may face the wrath of the Football Association - not least his national coach - after revealing England's plans to the Italians via an unwise phone call to his brother, Karl.

Le Tissier was among the starting XI last night, but there was speculation that Hoddle had contemplated dropping the Channel Islander before the critical Group Two qualifier as

punishment. After a week of tactical hide-and-seek with his Italian counterpart, Cesare Maldini, Le Tissier's phone call home appeared to have spoiled Hoddle's Wembley surprise.

Hoddle's master plan featured a recall for Le Tissier and Liverpool's Steve McManaman in a free-roving role behind Alan Shearer, but were wrecked when the player made a call to family in Guernsey on Tuesday night.

The news leaked out when the words of his brother, Karl, were broadcast on national radio, outlining England's tactics.

"What an idiot!" was one FA official's reaction to the news. Hoddle must have been left wondering if there was any way of repairing the damage; perhaps by changing his plans, which were revealed to include Gary

Neville in defence alongside Sol Campbell and Stuart Pearce, with no places for Gareth Southgate or Tony Adams.

The news took the edge off Le Tissier's recall to the starting line-up for the first time since the ill-fated game under Terry Venables in Dublin.

"He had no intention whatsoever when the team was announced," his brother told BBC Radio Guernsey whose interview was then replayed by Radio Five Live. "He was very surprised, because he has played a lot better than he is at the moment and never got on."

Karl further embarrassed his brother, adding: "He's got a free role just behind Shearer. Matt and McManaman both have the freedom to roam around."

Major launches 2006 quest

John Major yesterday officially launched England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup finals - with the full support of some of English finest footballers.

Sir Stanley Matthews, Sir Bobby Charlton, Nat Lofthouse and Tom Finney all said they totally supported the attempt to bring the World Cup back to England 40 years after the country last hosted the finals in 1966.

The Prime Minister, addressing a reception at No 10 Downing Street, said: "I believe it will be magnificently done and our facilities will be the equal of any in the world by then. There is no doubt about the desire of the British public to support the competition here."

A key element of the English bid is the rebuilding of Wembley Stadium, and the Prime Minister added: "The Twin Tow-

ers will remain but the rest of Wembley will be a magnificent stadium."

Sir Stanley Matthews, who played in the 1950, 1954 and 1958 World Cups, said: "I think it is very important for the future of the game in England. It seems to me that Germany has got their bid in first but I'm hoping that won't make a difference, because there are still a few years to go before a decision is made. I think our stadiums are as good now or better than theirs or anyone else's in the world and we can more than match anyone's bid."

Finney, who played alongside Matthews for England in the 1950s, added: "We fell behind the rest of the world in the 1970s and 1980s but have come back strongly in the last few years. We might not have won the European Championship last year, but

the country won in terms of the atmosphere and the way the nation got behind the team."

England and Germany are just two of the countries bidding to host the finals in nine years time, with rival bids expected from South Africa, Australia, Morocco and Egypt - and perhaps joint bids from Brazil/Argentina and Peru/Ecuador.

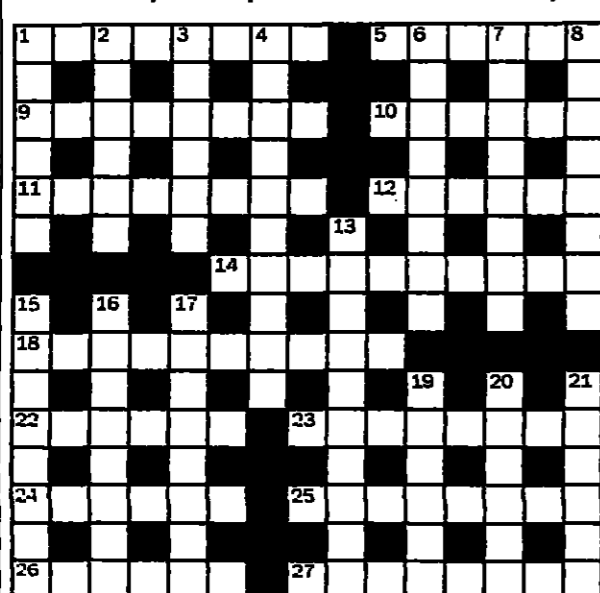
All bids must be submitted by the end of 1999 with the decision announced by Fifa, world football's governing body, in June 2000. Earlier this month Uefa, European football's governing body, announced it was giving its support to Germany's bid, and Lennart Johansson, the Uefa president, hinted on Tuesday that he would still back Germany's bid. "I know what decision I made and I know who was there," he said.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3221, Thursday 13 February

By Phil

Wednesday's Solution



ACROSS

- 1 Trim cut - hint for cook (8)
- 5 Frustrate the spirit (6)
- 9 Might it provide a recipe for tax evasion? (4,4)
- 10 Make point during case (6)
- 11 Learned Longfellow's treasure (end of 'Hiawatha', note) (8)
- 12 Plot is rank, one filled with slugs (6)
- 14 No time for anger in company with American brave (10)
- 18 Plant in current caught by one reeling in? (10)
- 22 Lords, say, involved in misrepresentations (6)
- 23 Quixote knocks back round, including pop! (8)
- 24 Got a lot more than others? (6)
- 25 Ladylike dress, new, covered by salary? (8)
- 26 Odds on outfit's showing ornaments (6)

DOWN

- 1 Twist, getting money on the Parisian (6)
- 2 One's birthplace is furnished with Southern settles (6)
- 3 What's to become of the guy? (6)
- 4 Irregular Union point - nothing on cuts, we hear (10)
- 6 Trap girl pinching silver (8)
- 7 Judge reduced case tension (8)
- 8 Quite unlike 'The Observer' (8)
- 13 A right to have an address on the house? (4,6)
- 15 Wolf's making for swamps (6)
- 16 Original manufacturer's funnel, in wrought iron (8)

- 17 Mad on Eastern ornament as a present (8)
- 19 One declines to go around Northern islands (6)
- 20 A house of cards? (6)
- 21 Arrival of five in port on time (6)

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